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THE MAGAZINE OF Fantasy AND Science Fiction

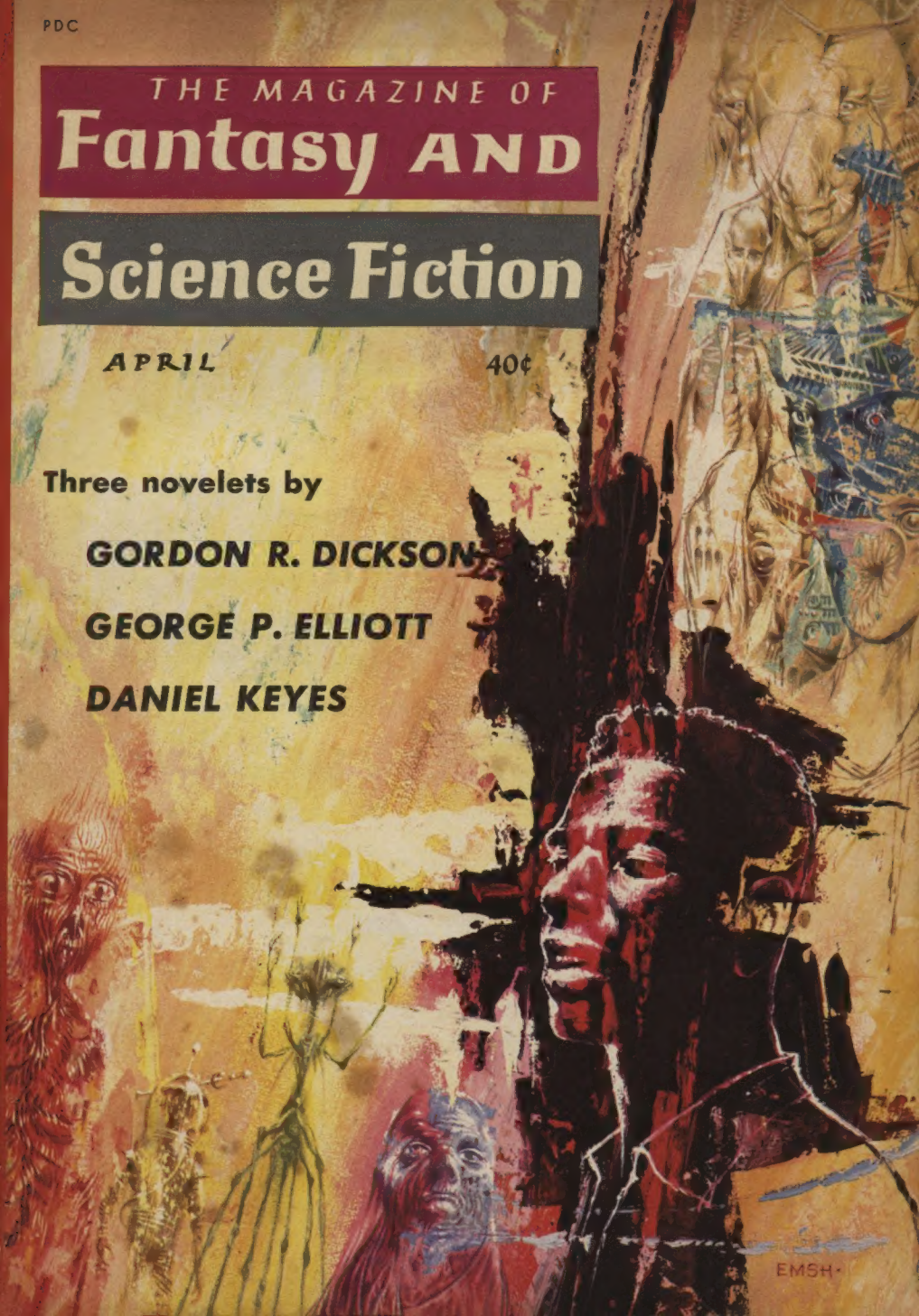
APRIL 40¢

Three novelets by

GORDON R. DICKSON

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

DANIEL KEYES



Fantasy and Science Fiction

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In this issue . . .

This month Damon Knight, F&SF's sometimes kindly, sometimes caustic book reviewer, takes a backward look at the 1959 crop of science fiction and fantasy in book form . . . and also offers a list of his ten favorite science fiction books of the last ten years. There have been many fine things in the 1950's, despite the slump which hit the field in the last few years, and Mr. Knight also looks forward to the good things to come. As a footnote to this month's column, Mr. Knight offers the following comment, with which we wholeheartedly concur:

"At the beginning of every decade since the founding of *Amazing Stories* in 1926, there has been a boom in science fiction. In the latter half of every decade, there has been a slump. In spite of many cries of alarm ('Do you realize there are only *nine* magazines on the stands?' said a lady to me, forgetting the golden age when there were only three), I believe our recent slump was healthful and necessary, and that we are already in the beginning of the 1960 boom. Good reading!"

The story by Kurt Kusenberg on page 48 originally appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*—specifically, in the supplement on Germany provided by Intercultural Publications Inc., an organization established in 1952 through a grant made by the Ford Foundation under its program in support of world peace through international understanding. Through its series of soft-cover anthologies of the contemporary art and thought of countries throughout the world—all of them first brought out as supplements to *The Atlantic Monthly*—Intercultural has sought to promote two-way cultural exchange, and a very good job it has done.

Coming next month . . .

"The Oldest Soldier," a short novelet by Fritz Leiber which was tentatively planned for this issue, will definitely appear in the next. Among other offerings there will be a strong new novelet by Philip Jose Farmer concerning a man, and others, on Mars . . . an eerie little tale by Rex Lardner . . . and further adventures of the ruum, by Arthur Porges.

More than once it has happened that an author produces one story so fine that everything he writes afterward is inevitably compared to it. May your memory of the wonderful "Flowers for Algernon" not inhibit your appreciation of this strong new Keyes story, concerning a wild Negro boy with a dangerous and immensely valuable talent. . . .

CRAZY MARO

by Daniel Keyes

THE WAY SOME PEOPLE HUNT for antiques or old books, searching through second-hand stores, rummage shops, or musty auction rooms for the priceless articles that unknowing people have discarded—in that same way I trace unusual children. Being a lawyer, I have access to the good hunting spots: The Children's Shelter, Warwick, The Paige School for Emotionally Disturbed Adolescents, and—of course—the Juvenile Court.

I've made some finds, and I've been well paid for some rare items. Fifty-thousand dollars for a blonde thirteen-year-old delinquent who had spent six months in a Georgia reformatory, and my fee could have been doubled if I'd wanted to haggle with them. She was the first real telepath they'd ever found.

There was the case of the four-month-old mongoloid idiot with the squashed nose and jaw. I got to the unwed mother in time to stop her from smothering it. The tests, provided by my clients, proved beyond doubt that the child was indeed a para-genius—one they were really interested in. I netted twenty-thousand after paying the mother five thousand to sign the adoption papers.

But the strangest one I ever went after, a tall, eighteen-year-old Negro boy with a wild look in his rolling eyes, changed my life. He was called Crazy Maro, and they had offered me a half a million clear if I could get him to sign the waiver and agree to be transported into the future.

The first time I saw Maro there were three boys after him. He was too fast for them and when one of them had him cornered, Maro turned and with the grace of an antelope, darted out of reach.

"Crazy Maro!" one of them taunted.

The others took up the chant.

"Crazy Maro! Crazy Maro! . . ."

He stood there on the corner, just fifty yards from them, hands on his hips, sweating and panting for breath. He dared them to come after him, but they had given up the chase.

He saw me watching him, or—as I had been informed—he smelled me or heard me or felt me, or all of these at once. He perceived with all his senses that I was there. I'd been told he could *smell the colors* beyond the visible spectrum as easily as he could smell the colors of a girl's pink and blue summer dress; he could *see the sound* of high-frequency radio waves as sharply as he could see the barking of a dog; he could *hear the odor* of radioactive carbon as clearly as he could hear whisky on a bum's breath.

Although the records of the Juvenile Court showed that he'd been up before the court three times since the age of nine for petty theft and violent behavior, he was needed in the year 2752 to do a job that no human being born before or since could do. That is why they commissioned me to get him. I'd been wandering around this neighborhood between St. Nicholas and Eighth Avenues, commonly referred to by its inhabitants as "the pit," for more than a month with not much data to go on, but now I was certain he was the one they wanted.

Free of his tormentors, he sauntered across the street to where I was standing, his hands deep in the pockets of his patched, wash-pale dungarees. He looked me up and down and cocked his head to one side like a bird or a dog who has heard high-pitched vibrations.

"You *cool* man?"

"No," I said. "I'm quite comfortable."

He snapped his fingers. "Don't bug *me,* mister. You ain't square. You dig me all right. You're cool and deep and rough. Gritty and smooth like worn-out sandpaper." He winked and glared at me out of one eye, as if through a jeweler's glass. "Give me a dollar."

"Why?"

"Cause I'm tough. You get away all in one piece if you pay me. Otherwise . . ." He shrugged to indicate the hopelessness of my case if I didn't pay up.

"Why do they call you Crazy Maro?"

He stared at the sidewalk and it made his eyelids flutter. "Cause I am. Why else? Man, you smell green and paper—like money. Now it's gonna cost you two dollars."

"Why do you expect me to give you money you haven't earned?"

When his head came up, there were only the whites of his eyes against the dark lids. He stood there swaying back and forth to a silent rhythm, snapping his fingers and clapping his hands to a

beat he seemed to hear from within. He came out of it frowning.

"You a cop?"

"No," I said. "I'm a lawyer." I fished a card out of my vest pocket and handed it to him. "As you see, it says Eugene—"

"I can read," he snapped. He studied the card and read the words slowly. "Eugene H. Denis . . . attorney-at-law . . ." He studied me and then put the card in his pocket. "It says you're a lawyer. So what do you want with me?"

"Well, er . . . if you would come to my office we could talk privately."

"We can talk right here."

He was touchy and I had to be careful. "Well, if you prefer. My clients have heard about you. They know about your—er—special talents, and they've authorized me to contact you about an important position. The only thing is that I'm not permitted to divulge—I mean tell you—the details unless you agree to go. You would be getting out of this neighborhood permanently, and—"

He was watching me curiously, and then before I knew what was happening, he grabbed my arm. I tried to pull away. "What are you doing? What's the matter?"

He laughed and slapped his thigh with his big hand. "You're scared to death of me. You're afraid I'm gonna hurt you." There was meanness in his eyes suddenly. "Well, I am. I'm going to knock your teeth down your throat."

Somehow I knew he was going to do it. "Why?" I said, still trying to get free of him. "I'm not trying to fool you. This is a great opportunity. You can trust me—"

His long left hand snapped out before I could avoid it and caught me on the mouth. Then a knee came up and hit my groin. I doubled forward and fell to the sidewalk. "What—what's the matter with you?" I choked, trying to catch my breath. "You nuts? I've come to help you."

He stood over me and watched me. And then he gagged and made a sour face as if he tasted and felt the blood that trickled from the corner of my mouth.

"Salty-sick," he sputtered. "Stop grinding on my teeth."

"Don't hit me," I begged him. "I'm your friend." I was afraid of the fury in his rolling eyes, and yet I was afraid I'd lose him.

"Friend, hell!" He kicked my side. "You smell scared of me. You don't trust me, and you don't like me, and it smells like a file grinding on my teeth."

"I'm not scared of you, Maro." I tried to control my agony. "I like you. I came here looking for you. They need you, and you need them—"

Another kick.

"Don't lie. You're scared of me.

Well, you can just have another —"

Out of the corner of his eye he must have caught the glimpse of the blue uniform, or maybe he smelled it or heard it or felt it at the end of his long fingertips. "Oh, crap, man," he sighed. "Cops again."

He drew up tight like a frightened deer caught in the bright glare of headlights.

"Wait, Maro!" I shouted. "Don't go. I won't press charges."

He fled.

I shouted after him. "The address on the card! Come and see me! It's important to you!"

He looked back for an instant as he sprinted across the street. I saw the big white smile of his teeth, broad and mocking, against the dark skin. The only fear I had now was that he would not come to me. He might think I was setting a trap for him. It had taken me nearly two months to find him, and in less than half an hour I had driven him off by botching the whole thing. I had made the mistake of being afraid of him.

For the next three days I stayed close to my Park Avenue apartment. All I could think of was that dark glistening face and the white mocking smile. Would he come? And if he did, would he agree to be transported into the future?

In the past, the others I had sent had been easy to handle. They hadn't asked embarrassing questions and it hadn't been necessary for me to explain that I could tell them nothing about the time, the place, or the job to which they were going. But Maro, wild as he was, was an intelligent adolescent. Would he accept the fact that he was trading a life and society in which he was a mistake and a misfit for one in which he was right and desperately needed? How in the world was I going to get him to trust me with his life?

The third night the tapping on the window woke me. My radio-clock said 3:45. I started to reach for my .32 automatic in the night-table drawer, but I rejected the idea. Maro would smell danger the same way he had smelled fear and it would make him violent. I couldn't pretend with him. I had to show him I trusted him, or he would resent it. I got out of bed and unlocked the window before turning on the light.

He drew back, lost for an instant in the shadows. I heard him sniffing.

"Come on in, Maro. There's no one else here. I've been waiting for you."

He edged closer to the window, alert to everything in the room behind me. I backed away from the window. He leaped over the sill and landed on the floor without a sound.

It was the first time that I got

a close, unhurried look at him. He was tall and sinewy with his hair shaved close to his skull. His fingernails were bitten down beyond the quick and his arms bore long shiny scars. He trembled expectantly as he waited for me to speak. I started to work on him.

"I understand you now, Maro. At least, I know about you and accept you for what you are. To many people who don't appreciate your special gifts, you're frightening. People hate what they don't understand, which is why you have to hide and pretend—"

He laughed and dropped into my easy chair.

"Am I wrong?"

"You're so wrong it stinks. Maybe—if you were in my place—you'd hide. I can smell it in you. You're afraid of your own goddam shadow. Right now you're feeling around for the right words like a man trying to climb up out of a slippery bowl. Man, don't you know yet that I can *feel* it? You're looking at me, Mr. Denis, but you don't see me. You're acting. And if there's one thing that gets me sick inside and mad enough to kill, it's when people don't trust me."

His voice, intense and angry, had so absorbed me that only when he stopped to glare at me, was I shocked to realize that his speech and manner had changed completely. There was no trace of the drawling, slurring dialect, no trace of the wild "bop talk" he had used the first time we met. His eyes were starting to roll again and I saw him kneading his fists. I thought of the gun in the drawer. He quivered and leaned forward with his body tensed to the danger in the air. In that second, I realized that I was handling the whole thing wrong. I decided on the ultimate gamble—telling the truth.

"Hold it," I snapped. "Okay, you're right. I'm afraid of you, and you know it. There's no sense in my trying to fool you. I have a gun in that drawer, and for a second I was thinking I needed it to protect myself."

As I said it, he relaxed. He leaned his head back on the chair and rolled it to massage the muscles in his neck. "Thanks," he sighed. "I didn't know what it was, or where, but I knew it was something. When anyone lies to me or puts it on for me, I feel it hurt deep inside my guts. That's one of the things Dr. Landmeer thinks he can cure. He says I've got to accept people lying and pretending all the time, and when I learn to live with it, I'll be normal."

The court records had mentioned the fact that Maro was to be referred for psychiatric examination, but I had no idea that he would be undergoing treatment. "This Dr. Landmeer . . . have you been seeing him long?"

"Eight months. The judge sent me to the psycho-clinic, and they

sent me to Dr. Landmeer. He's a phoney like all the rest. Even though I know he thinks he's helping me, there are times I want to grab him by the throat and make him stop. He lies and pretends he trusts me, and he thinks I don't see through him. Costs me half a buck a visit. Hey, you know some people pay him fifteen, twenty bucks an hour?"

"Some of them get more," I mused. "Fifty or sixty an hour."

He squinted at me. "You ever been analyzed?"

"No. When I was a kid my father took me to five different psychoanalysts. He finally gave up."

He laughed and slapped me on the back as if he enjoyed the idea. "My old man's just the opposite. He's a minister and he figures it's more important to save my soul. Anyway, I can't take it much longer. That couch of Landmeer's stinks from the talk of so many people. There's a green touch that hammers away so I can hardly hear myself thinking. But he don't hear anything at all, so how can he make me normal? You think I'm crazy, Mr. Denis?"

"No, I don't."

He snickered. "Yes you do. You're crapping me."

"Look," I said, making no effort to hide my annoyance, "You're needed in the future the way you are. If this doctor changes you, you're no good to them."

"The future?" His eyes opened wide.

"That's the deal. There's not much I can tell you except that there is an agency operating out of the future to pick up special children who are born in a time when their talents aren't understood. Kids like you are isolated, or scorned, or even destroyed in their own time. This way they live useful happy lives in a time that needs them."

He gave a long low whistle and dropped back into the chair.

"Wow!" he said. "Dr. Landmeer wants to make me normal. My old man wants to save my soul. Delia wants to make a he-man out of me. And now you come along and tell me I'm okay the way I am, but I'm just living in the wrong time."

I nodded. "That's the size of it."

He got up and paced back and forth, sniffing the air and rubbing it between his fingers. "And you?" he asked, "I can't figure your angle."

I hesitated for a moment and then decided to stay with the truth. "If I get you to agree to go and to sign a waiver of your right to return, I get a half a million dollars."

He sniffed again and then shook his head. "There's something else you're looking for. It's not only the money. You want something out of this more than the money."

"There's nothing else." I insisted. His nostrils trembled in anger as he tightened up all over. "Nothing else that I *know* of, Maro. I swear, if there's anything else, I don't know what it is."

He relaxed again and smiled, studying me through fluttering lids. "How did you get mixed up in this racket, Mr. Denis? I thought you were a lawyer."

Under the pressure of trying to get him to relax with me and trust me, I spoke freely about my becoming a criminal lawyer when I got out of Harvard Law School instead of joining my father and older brother in the firm of *Denis & Denis*, corporation lawyers. I explained how in the eyes of the upper-crust of the legal profession this made me a social outcast, and how my father disinherited me because of it, and how I felt free for the first time in my life, not having to depend on him for anything.

"You meet all kinds of people when you work in the criminal courts," I said. "You're probably too young to remember the case that was on the front pages about six years ago—about the kid who was in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the neck down. He was accused of a dozen thefts from jewelry stores."

Maro leaned forward. "What? That's crazy."

"Well, they never found out how it was done, but he was there every time it happened, and the police found the missing articles in his room. I took the case, and I got him off. I didn't know at the time that he was really guilty."

"But how—?"

"That's what no one else could figure out either. But the story made the front pages for a week. A few months later, after it all died down, they got in touch with me from the future. *They* figured out how he did it, and they wanted him badly. When I confronted the kid with it, he admitted everything. Sure he'd been born paralyzed from the neck down. Sure his muscles were withered away. But there had been a compensation. He was a telekinetic. It was amazing to see how that kid could move and manipulate things around by just using his mind."

"Did he agree to go?"

"Well, at first he was frightened. I didn't blame him. I was suspicious too. I thought that maybe they were crackpots or criminals out to do him some harm. But they sent a man down to see me. He was a lawyer too, and he proved to me beyond doubt that it was okay. When the boy found out that he could really be useful to the world, he was crazy to go. I could hardly hold him back.

"After that first contact with my clients, they got in touch with me from time to time when their researchers found hints or clues about someone special they wanted

to move up. I find what they want, get the person's agreement to be transported, and they take care of the rest. The money is always deposited to my account. I've closed nine deals with them in the past five years, and there's not much more that I know."

Maro had been sitting hunched over, never moving his eyes from my face. "And did all the others go without knowing where to or what they were to be used for?"

I nodded. "That's part of the deal. The one thing my clients insist upon. Otherwise it can't be done legally. You've got to trust them."

"And you—I've got to trust you. I don't know anything about them but what you tell me. I've got to put my life into your hands." He looked at the carpet and drew lines in the nap with the edge of his shoe. "Tell me, Mr. Denis, would you trust me that far?" Would you put *your* life into *my* hands?"

The question startled me. My first reaction was to reassure him, but he would know it wasn't true. "No," I said. "No sense in lying. You're like a wild animal to me. How could I trust you that way?"

"Then why are you really doing this, Mr. Denis?"

"I told you. For the money."

"That's crap."

"Is it?" I shouted. "Well believe it, if you want to, or not. I don't give a damn any more." I was angry, and since there was no sense in trying to hide it, I let myself go. "You can walk out of here right now if you want to, and we'll forget about the whole thing."

"What are you looking for, Mr. Denis?"

"It's the money, Maro! The money! The money!" I shouted at him. I was furious at him for making me lose control of myself. He stood there trembling and shaking as I screamed at him, and I felt my insides heaving too. My hands and armpits were clammy.

It was a bursting within me as I had never known before, a flow of anger and resentment so that I wanted to call him filthy names. I wanted to hit him. I wanted to hurt him. His teeth were chattering and his palms were up as he trembled. I hated him. I was sick inside with something waiting to rip loose and smash his face with everything I had.

And suddenly I hit him.

He made no effort to defend himself. I hit him in the face again and again and again, and he smiled as he took it. His eyes rolled up showing two white balls against the dark flesh. I grabbed his throat and I screamed at him. "Look at me! Look at me when I hit you, you bastard! Look at me when I hit you!"

And then, as suddenly as the wave came, it left. I was heavy and limp and soggy and I fell

back into the chair. My arms and legs were wet and I was trembling. We sat in silence for a while. Then in a soft voice, not to shatter the silence, he said, "I could trust you a little now, Mr. Denis."

"Why? I haven't changed."

"You have. A little. Enough for me to trust you a bit."

"That's no good," I said. "You've got to trust me completely."

He shook his head. "I trust you for as much as you've changed. Not completely yet. But once you turn on the juice, you're with it. Ever see a man hanging on the end of a live wire? He can't let go. That was what you were like there for a few minutes. Maybe you turned it on just to impress me, but once it's on—that's it. I know, man. I live with the juice turned on and way up all the time."

"Sounds like hell."

"Hell and heaven both. It's a short circuit for me because I'm lying across both wires. But about this putting myself into your hands and signing those papers—that'll take time."

"But how long?"

"You don't understand, Mr. Denis. That's up to you. Whenever you're ready to trust *me.*

I thought about it for a long time. He was right. It was that simple, that logical, that terrifying. He was ready now. I was the one who had to change. He would trust me when I was capable of trusting him. From his point of view it was only fair.

"I don't know if I can do what you ask, Maro. I'd like to, but I don't think I can. I've never been one to trust people. Do you know I stopped going to confession when I was thirteen? People tried to convince me that the priests never revealed anything that was told to them. But my father used to give large donations to the parish, and do you know to this very day I believe that he used to have weekly conferences with Father Moran about my confessions. Even though I know he could have found that book under my mattress without being told by Father Moran, I still can't get it into my head that I could have put complete faith in the priest.

"I can't let myself go that way, Maro. It's not just you. It's all people. I'm the kind of guy who always checks to make sure his wallet is there no matter who bumps into him. Last week I was talking to a judge that I know. He brushed up against me on the way out of the room, and before I knew it I had put my hand to my pocket. He didn't notice it, but I was embarrassed just the same. So how can you ask me to trust you completely?"

He smiled and then shrugged. "One of us will have to give in first, and you're the one who wants this thing. You need me more than I need you—and I'm sure

it's not only for the money—so you'll have to prove yourself to me first. That's the only way it can be."

I sat there and looked at him as he examined my apartment. "Quite a place you've got here. Must cost a fortune." He sniffed and cocked his head to listen. "No women up here, huh? You're not married either."

I sighed. "I almost was—about twenty years ago—when I was twenty-three. We broke up a week before the wedding."

"You figured she was after your family's dough?"

"No. She had wealth of her own—a rich old Connecticut family. But I didn't believe she really loved me. Down deep I was sure that she was seeing other men. She broke it off when she discovered I was spying on her. Just as well—it would never have worked out. I guess I'm just the bachelor type."

He stood there and studied me for a long time. "Well, Mr. Denis. I'm sorry about all that. But as far as I'm concerned, what I said still goes. I guess it's about time in your life you really trusted somebody. And it might as well be me."

It was dawn when he left, and I sat staring at the walls for a long time. The more I thought about it the lousier I felt. How did I go about trusting completely a kid like that—me? It was such a crazy thing to think about that it took three shots of bourbon before I could tell myself in the mirror:

"You've got to *show* him that you trust him. You've got to *really* trust him. You've got to *put your life into his hands.*"

That required another drink, and another, and the mirror started talking back to me . . .

The dreams I had were messes, of course. Variations of putting my life into Maro's hands, and each time backing out before the real test came. Finally, when they started setting fire to the half-million dollars, I found the courage. I handed him a cutlass and put my head on the chopping block. And the louse chopped it off. Only the face changed at the end of the dream. It wasn't Maro; it was my father.

It was a vivid session. I awoke at noon with a hangover—a very wobbly head—and I sat at the edge of the bed for a long time feeling sorry for myself and cursing myself for not being able to trust people. But this was getting me nowhere. I had to trust Maro, and if I wanted to be young enough to enjoy the money, I had to be damned quick about it.

The first step in the process of getting to trust him, I decided, was to get to know him as completely as possible. The names of the three people who knew him best came to me clearly: Dr. Landmeer, Reverend Tyler, and a girl by the name of Delia.

Through one of my contacts at the Municipal Mental Health Clinic, I learned that Dr. Landmeer had set aside six hours a week from his private practice to work with three cases assigned to him by the clinic. I learned also that his pet interest was research in adolescent psychotherapy.

In order to get him to talk to me freely, I had my friend at the clinic introduce me first to the directors as an attorney for one of the large philanthropic foundations handled by the firm of *Denis & Denis,* corporation lawyers. Our client, I hinted, was considering substantial donations to be made to worthwhile research projects.

An appointment was made for me to see Dr. Landmeer the following day.

Dr. Landmeer reminded me very much of one of the analysts my father had sent me to when I was a boy. He was short and stubby with thick glasses that distorted his brown eyes into curlicues like knots in a pine board. He ushered me into his consulting room—most enthusiastically.

"Mr. Williams, our director, tells me you're interested in adolescent psychotherapy, Mr. Denis."

"I have been told," I said, "that it is an important field for psychiatric research. I'd like to know a bit about the work that is being done by men like yourself."

"I have always felt," he said, settling in his leather chair and lighting his huge meerschaum pipe, "that techniques of working with adolescents have been neglected too much. It is in this period between childhood and adulthood that study is needed. I know how important it is because I suffered through many of the things that these kids are suffering through now, and if not for the help of one man who cared enough for me, I— Well, no need to go into that. All I can say is that I really feel close to these children who feel afraid and unwanted. There is no reason for the fantastic number of young people who are mentally crippled or destroyed each year. It's a crime."

"That's exactly why I'm here," I said. "Now, if you would tell me something about the cases that have been referred to you by the clinic. Without mentioning any names of course. Just what was wrong with them and how they're coming along."

He described his three clinic cases in detail. I pretended to be interested in the young violinist who had become paralyzed in both hands shortly after his father left his mother, and I asked provocative questions about the brilliant young girl who at the age of sixteen developed the compulsion to disrobe in public. Finally, he came to the young Negro boy who had delusions of persecution.

"A very intelligent boy," he said, "but disturbed. He feels that people are always lying to him. When he first came to me, he pretended to have all of the behavior and speech patterns that prejudiced people have associated with Negroes—the deep drawl, the shuffling walk, dullness . . ."

I nodded, recalling that first day I had seen Maro on the street. ". . . Now of course," Landmeer continued, "he drops the pose when he is with me. The Negro stereotype is his way of protecting himself in his dealings with non-Negroes. You see, he's clever and sensitive enough to know that most people *expect* him to behave that way, so they're easily fooled."

As Landmeer went on to describe him, it became evident that Maro had come here for nearly eight months without revealing his multi-sensory-perception. I knew that Landmeer in his desire to impress me with the importance of his work would have mentioned that strange talent if he had known of it. It was clear that although Maro trusted the doctor enough to discard certain traits, he did not trust him enough to reveal himself in any important way.

That was a warning to me. Now, in a sense, it was a race between the doctor and myself. If Maro ever gave himself over completely to Landmeer, he was lost to me and the future that needed him.

"Tell me, Dr. Landmeer, is it true, as I've heard about cases like this, that people who feel they're being plotted against are capable of violence?"

Landmeer pulled at his pipe. "You've got to understand that this patient of mine is emotionally unstable. He has deep-rooted hostilities. At the age of nine his father—a minister—revealed to him that he had been abandoned by his real parents when he was a newborn infant. The minister had heard an infant's cry and traced it to a cardboard box on top of a garbage heap. When he opened the box, he discovered that there was also a rat in it. An emergency transfusion saved the baby's life, but he bears scars on his arms and body to this very day."

"My God! Why was he told about it? Why tell a child of nine something like that?"

"According to the boy, his foster-father told him in a moment of anger. He wanted to prove to the boy that Providence had directed him to the spot where the box lay. I think we can understand some of the reasons for the patient's bitterness towards the world."

"Who wouldn't be bitter with a knowledge like that?"

The doctor nodded. "So to answer your question. With fear and hostility so deeply rooted, a patient like this would probably have no compunctions about violence.

However, let me point out that in this case, I feel very confident. The boy is improving. I'm sure that eventually he will be able to adjust to society."

"I can see," I said, getting up to leave, "that your work with young people is extremely important. It should not be allowed to suffer for lack of funds."

The warmth and gratitude in his face was overwhelming, and I decided then and there that if my own little project with Maro ever succeeded I was going to donate a small portion of my fee to Dr. Landmeer's research.

None the less, I left Dr. Landmeer's office more confused and disturbed than when I went in. Throughout the conversation, I had the feeling that something was missing. The picture he gave me of Maro did not fit with the pieces of the boy's personality that I already had. Something was wrong . . .

At the home of Reverend Tyler, I discovered another facet of Maro's character. Mr. Tyler made a great display of cooperation when I told him that I was making a survey for the Child Welfare Bureau—a survey of adopted children who became habitual delinquents.

"I've had a time with that boy, sir." The reverend thumped the table to punctuate his remarks. "It's been a struggle to bring that boy into the flock. He was cast away, and with the Lord's guidance, I snatched him out of the Devil's jaws. He's got the mark of Cain on him, he has. But we're going to save his soul."

"What we at the Bureau are interested in, Reverend, is what he's really like. There might be a clue that would help us with other children on our case list."

He shook his head. "He was always a very emotional child. No matter what you wanted him to do, he did the opposite. I'm a mild man, Mr. Denis. But there were times . . . Do you know that when he was only nine years old, he got into a fight with a boy. He had one hand round the boy's throat and a knife in the other. I came upon them unexpectedly. If I hadn't been sent to intervene by the All-Mighty, he'd have killed that child."

"How do you know he'd have killed the boy? Maybe he was just trying to frighten him. Maybe he knew you were nearby and would stop him."

The minister glared. "Indeed! You don't know Maro. He has always been violent. Up to a few years ago, try as I would, it was impossible to teach him a fear of the All-Mighty. Between that knife and the other boy's heart, there was nothing to stop the deed but my hand directed by Providence. After all, Mr. Denis—what is it that keeps people from

destroying each other but fear of Divine Wrath?"

"A faith in mankind . . ." I mumbled absently, thinking of what Maro would have said to that.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing," I said, "just thinking aloud."

"Well, I can tell you it took a great deal of personal pain and inspired guidance to put the fear of Hell into that boy. But thank Heaven I am succeeding. Maro has lately shown a turn to religion that gives me great hope. Wouldn't it be glorious if he were called to the ministry?"

I agreed that it would, and took my leave of Reverend Tyler. The religious aspect didn't fit Maro at all. And neither did the incident with the knife. If Maro had really intended to stab the boy, then he was certainly too fast and clever to be stopped by the reverend. He would have seen or heard or smelled him coming. The real question was: "Why *didn't* he kill the boy?" I had no answer yet. Instead of understanding him, I was unraveling a nature more complex and shifting than any I had ever known.

There was only one person left to see—the one who probably knew him more intimately than anyone else. Would she be able to provide me with the key to Maro's nature?

Delia Brown lived in a tenement on 127th Street and Lenox Avenue. She wouldn't let me into the apartment at first.

"I'm not a cop, Delia. Look, you don't have to tell me where Maro is. I've already seen him, and I've spoken to Dr. Landmeer and the Reverend Tyler. It's you I want to talk to—"

She opened the door a little wider, but in her hand she held an ice-pick. "What about?"

I decided to gamble on the truth. "About trusting Maro. He wants me to trust him, and I've got to know about him first. I would think, Delia, that if you're really his kind of girl, you wouldn't need that thing."

My words stung her. She glared at me and then at the ice-pick in her hand. Then she set it on the table and moved away from the door. She sank into a chair as I pushed the door open.

"So you know him," she said. "Well, I can't be like him. He's a fool. You can tell him that if you want to."

"Then Maro does trust people. He's not afraid of them."

She shrugged. "He's not afraid of anything or anyone in the world. He's too simple and trusting to fear anyone. He's such a child."

"Then why does he pretend to be afraid? Why is he so wild and violent?"

"Wild and violent? Maro?" Her

eyes opened wide and she laughed. "Oh, my. I thought you knew what he was really like, the way you talked. Why he's the most peaceful, most gentle soul on this earth. He wouldn't harm a living thing."

This description didn't come any closer to the Maro I knew. It didn't fit the picture of the boy who had smashed a fist into my face and kicked me in the ribs the first time we'd met. I began to feel more and more like a fool. Each time I reached out to grab his image, it slipped away from me like a cake of wet soap. She didn't know him either.

In fact, none of the people who were close to him really knew him. He had kept from each of them his multi-sensory perception, and I began to suspect he had carefully shielded those qualities of his character which disagreed with their different pictures of him.

". . . He's a helpless child." she was saying. "I have to protect him from himself. He'd let people walk all over him and take advantage of his good nature if I didn't scold him for it all the time. Last week he gave a stranger his last dollar. Can you imagine that? A perfect stranger. Maro needs me to take care of him and look after him. But he's getting better. I've convinced him to keep away from bad company . . . other boys influencing him to do bad things. He's such a trusting fool."

She grabbed my sleeve. "Not that I mind, really. He could become something special with the right kind of woman giving him the right kind of love. And he's changing. He's getting common sense. And if there's one thing in this world that a man needs it's common sense. I don't know what kind of a job it is you've got for him, but you could trust that boy with anything." She laughed wearily. "Mr. Denis, that boy doesn't know enough about life to be dishonest. No one ever told him the truth about Santa Claus."

Listening to Delia talk, as I saw our reflection in the clouded mirror over her dressing table, I became aware of the secret of Maro. Everything fell into place. Maro, with his unusual ability to perceive, could detect a person's feelings and know instantly what that person thought of him. He simply reflected the kind of character that person thought him to be. Protective coloration.

Maro was a mirror.

To Dr. Landmeer, he was a neurotic, not to be trusted because that was what the doctor believed him to be; and as the doctor thought he was curing Maro, Maro was getting well. To Reverend Tyler, Maro had been a lost soul; and as the reverend believed he was saving Maro, Maro was becoming religious. To Delia, who saw in Maro a simple youth needing her care and protection, Maro

was childlike; and as she saw herself strengthening him against the world, Maro was growing up.

Maro was all of these things, and none of them. He gave to each person that part of him that was needed. To me he had been a wild, strange, violent creature, and so he was wild, strange and violent. I didn't trust him, and he reflected that. Now I feared that he was capable of murdering me. And so . . .

All the way back to my apartment, I pondered over what I'd learned. Whether or not Maro's strange talents had been created in the upheaval of genetic mutation, there was little doubt in my mind that the unusual events of his infancy had contributed to the development of his shifting senses. For just that reason he was important to *them*—he was an accident of heredity compounded by a special hostile environment, a combination that might never happen again. They needed him, and so he had to go. It was up to me to arrange it.

It was a strange cycle I found here. Maro could be trusted . . . I could have complete faith in him . . . *if I honestly believed I could.* And I could not pretend to believe. He would know pretense, and that would be fatal. I had to put my life into his hands . . . or else forget about the whole thing.

Maro was the mirror. I was the one who had to change.

He was, as I had expected, waiting for me in my apartment. He was smoking my cigarettes and drinking my whiskey, his feet propped up on the coffee table, a clear reflection of the cocky youth I had judged him to be.

I stood there quietly looking at him, not thinking, just letting myself relax and be open in his presence. Knowing what he was really like, I was no longer afraid of him, and he sensed it.

He laughed. Then, seeing the look on my face, he put down the cigarette and stood up frowning. "Hey," he said, "what gives?" He sniffed the air and rubbed it between his fingers. His eyes rolled up and closed and he swayed back and forth as he had done the first time I saw him.

"You've changed," he whispered. There was awe in his voice. "Your breathing—it's like cold water right down to the bottom, and you smell smooth and clear like glass." He was confused. "I've never seen anyone change like that before." His expression shifted from bitterness to scorn to fear to anger to amusement to pleading to childlike simplicity and then, finally, went blank. It was as if he were trying on all the masks in his repertory, shifting back and forth to find out what it was I expected of him, trying to find out what I believed he was like, which of the

Maros I wanted him to be. But, as he said, I had become smooth, cold water and clear glass.

He dropped back into the chair, and waited. He sensed that I knew him and he was waiting to see what I would do. The cold water, the clear glass that he saw in me had to become a mirror. For the first time in his life, someone was going to be what Maro wanted. Someone was going to reflect *his* need. And what Maro had needed more than anything else in the years of his growing up was to be trusted.

I caught the movement of his eye to the nighttable drawer. He knew that I kept my gun there. It was as if he could sense my readiness to trust him, and he was showing me how to prove it. It was clear what I had to do. I had to try to kill myself, trusting that he would interfere to save me.

My inner self rebelled. What if I was wrong? What if Maro wasn't at all what I believed him to be? What if he didn't stop me? It was stupid—utterly ridiculous to trust anyone that much. A man couldn't even trust his own . . .

A picture flashed across my mind—a memory from my childhood. *My father standing at the foot of the staircase. Myself five or six steps up. He reaches out and calls to me to jump into his arms. He'll catch me. I'm afraid. He coaxes me . . . assures me daddy won't let me fall. I jump. He moves away and I scream as I fall to the floor. Hurt and angry. Why did you lie to me? Why? . . . Why . . . And the laughter and the words and the voice of my father, never forgotten. "That's to teach you never to trust anyone—not even your own father."*

Was that why I had never married, or loved, or believed in anyone? Was that the fear that had imprisoned me all these years behind the safe, hard shell of suspicion? It was clear to me that at this moment my decision was as important to me as it was to Maro. If I backed away now, I would never in my life be able to trust anyone.

He was watching me. He was wanting me to believe in him.

Without speaking, I went to the drawer, opened it and removed the gun. I checked it to make sure it was loaded, and then I faced him. He showed no emotion, made no sign.

"I trust you, Maro," I said. "You need proof of my faith in you. Well, then, so do I. Let's both see if I'm capable of giving it . . . if I can pull this trigger . . ."

I put the muzzle of the gun to my right temple. "I'm going to count to three. I want to believe that you'll stop me before I kill myself."

He smiled. "Will you really do it? Maybe I won't stop you. Maybe I'll be too slow. Maybe—"

"One."

"You're a fool, Mr. Denis. It's not worth half a million dollars to take a chance like this. Or isn't it the money after all? What is it you expect to prove?"

"Two." *Would my finger react to the command? Was I capable of doing it? Then, almost as if our minds touched for an instant, I knew that I would do it . . . as clearly as I knew that he would save me. Nothing else was worth knowing. It felt good.*

The smile left his face. He breathed deeply and clenched his fists. His eyes were wide.

"Three."

I squeezed the trigger without closing my eyes.

In that instant between me and eternity, Maro sprang. His hand lashed out and whipped the gun aside. The bullet grazed my forehead and crashed into the wall beside us. The white explosion burnt my face and I fainted.

When I came to, I felt him hovering over me. He had put a wet towel across my face. "You'll be okay," he said. "Powder burns. I've called for a doctor."

"That was close," I said.

"You're a fool!" He moved back and forth restlessly, hitting his fists. "A damned fool. You shouldn't have done it."

"You wanted me to. I'm glad I did. It was as much for myself as for you."

He was overexcited now. I heard him stalking back and forth. A hassock was in his way and he kicked it aside. "I shouldn't have waited so long. I didn't think you were really going to do it. I didn't know. No one ever believed in me that way before. I think that all my life I've been waiting for someone who really would trust me. I didn't think it would be you."

I nodded. "I didn't think so either. I never trusted anyone like that since I was a small child. I've found something deep inside myself that I thought had been destroyed. It was worth it."

"Mr. Denis . . ." He moved back and sniffed the air.

"What's the matter?"

"There's something out there. Far away and yet close by. Music, but not real music. Faint violet and burnt-yellow ribbons of sound winding around me and dissolving. It's here and now and yet it's far off in the future."

"That's the place and time for you, Maro. They need you there—for what you are, the way you are. And you need them. You've got to trust them."

"I trust you, Mr. Denis. If you say it's all right, I'll go."

"It's all right. I'm not saying it for the money, you know that. I'm giving my fee to the clinic. I have more than enough for myself. I'm retiring. This will be my last job for them."

"You'll figure out something to

tell Dr. Landmeer and my old man and Delia for me?"

"I will."

I told him how to call the telephone answering service to let them know that he was ready to leave. They would tell him where to wait and they would send someone to pick him up. He took my hand and clasped it for a long time.

"Mr. Denis, I thought you might like to know. That music . . . I saw and felt . . . you were right. It was from them. It was a hint about what they need me for."

"Can you tell me?"

"It's not clear, Mr. Denis. But I saw a picture of a great gathering of people. They can't understand each other at all, and nobody knows what the others want. Words seem to have lost all meaning. Like . . . like what happened in the Old Testament when they built the Tower of Babel. There's a lot of confusion. I think they need me to help them talk to each other, and trust each other—and make peace."

"I'm glad you told me, Maro. It makes me feel better."

"So long, Mr. Denis."

"So long."

I waited until I heard the front door slam shut, and then I took the towel off my face and rolled over to sit on the edge of the bed. I felt around in my pockets for my cigarette lighter. I flipped it on, holding it up in front of my face. There was searing heat and the crackle and pungent odor of burning hair as I singed my eyebrows. But no light.

And then I knew what it was like to be totally blind.

I lay back in the bed, and from somewhere there flowed in through my window the sound of music. For a fleeting moment, I thought I heard it the way Maro had heard it—faint violet and burnt-yellow ribbons of sound winding about me and dissolving. But then the multiple image was gone, and I heard the muted strains of the melody as I have heard all sounds and music ever since.

In darkness . . .

Note to writers

The fifth annual Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference will be held in mid-June, 1960. It lasts one week, and is open to all professional science fiction writers. For details, write to Damon Knight or Judith Merrill, Milford, Pike Co., Pa.

This new tale by Levi Crow takes place in the days when the prairie Indians had no horses, indeed had never heard of them . . . which made the mounted stranger with the pale skin and the hair on his face all the more impressive. The stranger's magic was great, but it was not always good; fortunately, however, he did not seem to think an Indian might have magic of a different sort. . . .

THE HAIRY THUNDERER

by Levi Crow

IN THOSE DAYS, OUR PEOPLE ON the prairie had no horses. They followed the game, dragging their lodge poles. Hunters crawled on hands and knees to get close and shoot the buffalo with arrows. Sometimes our young men hunted far southward and heard there about men farther south still, who rode on big animals. Our people laughed when the young men brought those stories back.

Tall Elk was chief of a band of forty lodges. His two sons had been killed fighting Pawnees, and he had only a daughter, named Lost Leaf because she was born when leaves fell. Tall Elk's best friend was Wind Voice. They were Midnight Strong Hearts together when they were young. Wind Voice had a lame leg and he was medicine man for that band, able to see what would happen and to cure little sick children.

The band was after buffalo when three young hunters saw a stranger far ahead of them, the strangest they had ever seen.

First they thought they saw deer or buffalo because there were two big animals, of a kind nobody knew except perhaps from those stories heard in the south. A man rode one animal, and to the other was fastened something that rolled along like a log or a big stone on a slope. The animals stopped by a stream, and the man got down and made a fire.

The rest of the band caught up. Tall Elk saw the man standing by his fire and looking. "We will see who he is," said Tall Elk.

Wind Voice went along, leaning on his feathered medicine pole that was strong to keep away danger. The three young hunters went too, with arrows on their bowstrings. The stranger put up his

right arm to show that he would talk. Tall Elk moved ahead. "Hai-ya," he said.

The day was a warm spring day, but the stranger wore leggings and a shirt of dark smoky skins. His face, too, was hidden, by strange thick hair, light-colored like dry grass. His eyes looked out, pale and hard and bright. His left hand held a staff, hard and bright like his eyes.

"Where do you come from?" asked Tall Elk.

"From far off." The stranger spoke our language, but his voice was rough and thick. "I have gone from my own people. Why do your young men have arrows to shoot at me?"

Far past the stream Tall Elk saw two buffalo. "We hunt those," he said, pointing."

"I will hunt for you," said the stranger.

He got on his animal and spoke a word nobody knew. The animal jumped across the stream and ran toward the buffalo. The stranger pointed his shiny staff. Fire and a cloud came out, and Tall Elk and the others heard a noise like thunder. A buffalo fell and kicked once. Back came the stranger on his animal.

"That meat is a present to you," he said. "Here is good water. Stay with me."

A chief speaks like that to another chief. The hunters went to cut up the buffalo, and Tall Elk told the people to set up their lodges. The stranger got off his animal.

"Your thunder staff is a strong medicine," said Wind Voice.

"It kills when I want it to," said the stranger.

"Can it kill a man?" asked Wind Voice.

"It can kill a man," the stranger told him.

This man with the loud weapon and the hairy face sounded dangerous. Tall Elk and other men were listening. Wind Voice was glad for his medicine pole that turned death aside.

"Can it kill me?" he said.

"It can kill you," said the stranger.

"Not while I have this," said Wind Voice, and fluttered the feathers on his medicine pole.

The stranger fed a hole at the end of his staff with black dust and a shiny thing like a pebble. He pushed them down with a wand as thin as a long arrow. "My thunder medicine can kill anything," he said.

Tall Elk and the others waited for Wind Voice's answer. He spoke as a medicine man must. "You can try," he said.

"Walk off a little way," the stranger told him. "Say when you are ready."

Wind Voice limped, counting five tens of places. Softly he chanted a spell to kill bad medicine. At last he stopped and turned around

and lifted the medicine pole high. "I am ready," he called.

Fire and thunder jumped from the staff, and Wind Voice fell as the buffalo had fallen. Some ran to him. There was a hole in his head above the eyes. The back of his head was smashed.

"You heard him tell me to try," the stranger said to Tall Elk.

Tall Elk said nothing for a moment. But the thing had been fair, and Tall Elk was chief and must be fair, too.

"You have done well," he said sadly. "Let there be no more killing."

"Good talk," said the stranger. "Let us live together here. I will kill more meat for your people."

They gave him the name of Hairy Thunderer. Everything about him was strange.

The thing his other animal pulled moved on two big round open shields, made of sticks branched out from the middle to round edges made of the same stuff as his thunder staff. Those round shields carried something of wood, flat beneath and on its four sides and open above. It was full of Hairy Thunderer's things.

He made a lodge of poles covered with mud, like a Pawnee lodge. Then he told Tall Elk to bring his chief men for a feast. Tall Elk brought ten wise helpers. He invited Lone Arrow, the son of Wind Voice, but Lone Arrow did not come. He was a young man who did not laugh or talk much, and he wanted to be a medicine man like his father. Tall Elk's slender daughter, Lost Leaf, was in Lone Arrow's thoughts. She had long thick hair that gleamed black, like water at night. She and Lone Arrow had begun to try not to look at each other.

At Hairy Thunderer's earth lodge, the guests ate roast buffalo meat and strange dried fruit. Then Hairy Thunderer brought out pots made like gourds with thin necks. A man could see through them. There was brown water inside. Hairy Thunderer told Tall Elk and the others to drink. "It is a strong medicine to make your hearts good," he said.

The brown water stung their throats like fire, but they felt strong and brave and glad. They sang songs until they fell down and slept in Hairy Thunderer's lodge. They dreamed big dreams.

The next day, Tall Elk wanted more fire-drink, but Hairy Thunderer said: "My friend, I have only a little. I must grow corn to make more. Send women to hoe the ground for me."

Tall Elk said to do what Hairy Thunderer wanted. The corn grew as the women worked. Hairy Thunderer killed buffalo for the band, and came back to watch the women work. Lost Leaf was among them, and Hairy Thunderer's pale eyes watched her more than they watched the others.

Seeing that, Lone Arrow refused Hairy Thunderer's gifts of meat. He was almost the only man who refused. He hunted for himself.

When the corn was ripe, the women ground it. Hairy Thunderer mixed the ground corn with water in pots and left it until it made a smell of soaked corn. Then, from his thing that rolled on shields, he took a big pot with a lean, winding neck like a snake. He cooked the soaked corn in it, and the long snake neck dripped fire-drink. Hairy Thunderer invited Tall Elk and the others to a second feast. They drank until their hearts were good, then they slept and dreamed.

Next day, when Tall Elk asked for fire-drink, Hairy Thunderer said: "We will trade. Bring furs and skins and whatever you have."

That began the worst time Tall Elk's band had ever known.

The men found that their throats burned and their bellies ached for fire-drink. As they wanted more, Hairy Thunderer asked more in trade. When snow came, he said: "I do not like to hunt in the cold. Kill deer and buffalo for me if you want fire-drink."

The men hunted, and the best meat went to Hairy Thunderer. Men gave their best robes and weapons for fire-drink, but they could not get enough. People went hungry because the hunters were thirsty.

The snow-time grew long, and game was scarce. Women asked for the corn they had hoed and ground, and Hairy Thunderer said it had all been made into fire-drink. Tall Elk thought the band should go to a better hunting ground; but Hairy Thunderer's lodge could not be moved, and because he had the fire-drink, Tall Elk and the men stayed where he stayed.

They killed deer and buffalo on days far apart. They hunted far for rabbits and grouse. Hairy Thunderer got the largest share of that little meat, and the skins and furs, too. People were cold and they did not know when they could eat.

Tall Elk was not wise now. People asked him what to do, but he could not tell them. Much of the time he slept from the fire-drink, dreaming dreams and waking to ask for more. Hunger and cold made sickness. Two old women and one old man and five children died.

Seeing these bad things, Lone Arrow walked in the cold evening to where Hairy Thunderer sat in front of his lodge, wrapped in some of the warm skins that had been given him.

"Hai-ha!" Hairy Thunderer greeted him. "Have you come to trade for fire-drink?"

"That fire-drink is a sickness," said Lone Arrow. "I know your heart. You give the fire-drink to

Tall Elk and the others so that you can live idly and be rich and be chief."

Lone Arrow spoke boldly, for the words took boldness to say. Hairy Thunderer laughed.

"You are a wise young man," he said. "Wise enough to know that I can be a bad enemy."

"You are a bad enemy now," said Lone Arrow. "To me and to my people. You killed my father. Kill me too, if you can."

Hairy Thunderer's frosty eyes made lightning, and the hair on his face stirred like grass in the wind. He reached inside his door for his thunder staff.

But Lone Arrow leaped, and they wrestled for the staff. Lone Arrow hooked his heel behind Hairy Thunderer's leg and threw him, and stood with the staff in his hands. Victory swelled in him.

"Now what is your medicine?" he cried, and threw the thunder staff far away.

Hairy Thunderer's face was afraid through the hair—white and sick, like fat on old dried meat. "Look out!" he yelled as the staff hit the ground.

It spit fire and noise. Lone Arrow felt a blow on his cheek, and blood ran down from there. But he lived. He laughed. "Your medicine is weak," he said.

Hairy Thunderer scrambled to the staff and caught it up. He rose and looked at Lone Arrow, with eyes that stabbed like knives.

"The sun sets," he said. "If you are in this camp when it rises tomorrow, I will kill you."

"Your staff only scratched me," Lone Arrow said.

"It was not in my hands. When I point it, you will die."

"You are telling lies," said Lone Arrow, and that was talk to make a fight and a killing, there at that place.

Hairy Thunderer stood beside the door of his lodge. A spider crawled next to the door. Hairy Thunderer smashed it with his hand. It made a tiny dark wet spot on the dry mud.

"I will kill you like that," he said. "You are as small and weak to me as that spider."

Lone Arrow looked at the wet spot. "A coward's blow," he said. "Why did you kill the spider? It did you no hurt."

"You will do me no hurt," Hairy Thunderer told him. "You will die as easily if you and I see the sun rise tomorrow at this same place."

"There was no need to kill the spider," said Lone Arrow, but then a thought came to him.

Our people never kill without a reason, he thought. We kill game, but no more than we need. We kill enemies, so that they will not kill us. Hairy Thunderer made medicine by killing the spider, he thought. He made a medicine to kill Lone Arrow.

"I am not afraid," said Lone Arrow, and it was not all a lie.

He turned his back, and the sun went down as he walked away.

At the door of the lonely lodge that had been his father's, he stopped. The sunset showed him a movement above the door. It was a spider, like the spider Hairy Thunderer had killed. It crawled there for warmth, almost level with Lone Arrow's eye.

"Hai!" said Lone Arrow. "Hairy Thunderer made medicine against me by killing a spider. If I kill this spider for medicine against him—"

He lifted his hand, but he held it in the air. The spider did not creep away. He thought its eyes were bright, watching him.

"No," said Lone Arrow to the spider, "I am not angry with you. Did I not escape death today? Why should I kill you?"

He put down his hand. The spider stayed where it was. Going in, Lone Arrow laid sticks for a medicine fire as he had seen his father do. Upon the fire he threw dust from his father's prayer pouch, and the burning was dark red. Lone Arrow sat close to the fire, legs crossed and arms folded for prayer.

"The thunder staff did not kill me," he said. "Strength must be come to me."

Above, in the blackness at the lodge's peak, he thought he saw eyes shine like floating sparks.

"Hai-ya!" he prayed. "You wise Ancient Ones, help me."

Nothing happened. He put more sticks on the fire, and more powder. He sang a medicine song. "Help me," he prayed again.

The eyes glared above him. A whisper came. "Goodbye," said the whisper. "Goodbye, Lone Arrow."

He knew the voice, and sprang across the fire and out into the night. The moon shone upon a slim figure beside his door. His hand touched the shoulder of Lost Leaf. She held her robe to her face and wept.

"You spoke to me," he said.

"Goodbye," she whispered again. "My father sends me to the lodge of Hairy Thunderer."

"What talk is that?"

"Hush. My father gave all he had for fire-drink. Hairy Thunderer will give him no more unless I come to his lodge." She trembled. "I heard him tell you to go, Lone Arrow. Leave this camp and do not come back."

Lone Arrow took his hand from her. "If you say that, I know you have not loved me. I will go."

Lost Leaf struggled with tears that choked her. "I love you," she made herself able to say. "But if you do not go, Hairy Thunderer will kill you."

"Hai!" said Lone Arrow. "Do you know that his thunder staff spoke to me and that I lived. A strong medicine has come upon me. He cannot kill me."

"He will hear you and come," wept Lost Leaf, but Lone Arrow drew her close. Under her robe his

arms clasped her body tight, and she drew the robe close around them both. They stood like that, as lovers stand, in the moonlight. Then at last:

"Wait in my lodge with me," said Lone Arrow. "My medicine speaks."

At the door she drew back. "A spider has spun its web across," she said.

"He killed a spider to show death to me," said Lone Arrow. "I gave a spider life to show that death will not strike me. Stoop, Lost Leaf, go in without breaking the web." He spoke to the spider: "Little brother, are not the strong bad to hurt the weak? I will not hurt you."

Inside, he and Lost Leaf sat down and folded their arms to pray. "Help me," said Lone Arrow; and, "Help him," whispered Lost Leaf.

There was a noise. "What is that?" he asked.

"I see something move," Lost Leaf said against his ear. "A leg. Many legs."

Lone Arrow thought he saw, too. They were thin, jointed legs, so long that they reached up to the smoke-hole where the bright eyes danced and winked. They might be shadows, he thought; or they might be medicine. Then a voice spoke, at the ear away from Lost Leaf, softer than Lost Leaf's whisper.

"Small, small," Lone Arrow thought it said. "Strong, strong."

He stood up. "Wait here," he told Lost Leaf, and ducked under the spider's web to go out.

He walked through the moonlight to Hairy Thunderer's lodge. From his mind he put the thought that one who dies in the dark must spend all time after death without the sun. He was naked to the waist, and he had no weapon but the knife in his belt. His heart burned like a coal. Hairy Thunderer's lodge was a big black shape with red light inside the door. Lone Arrow walked in and stood there.

A fire burned in the middle of the floor. Behind it sat Hairy Thunderer, against the wall. Beside him leaned his thunder staff. All around were stacked the furs and robes and meat he had won in trade for fire-drink.

He stood up. His teeth shone like a wolf's teeth in the hair.

"It is too late for you to make peace," he said. "If you are here at sunrise—"

"I do not talk about that," Lone Arrow replied. He folded his arms. "I have made a strong medicine to kill your power."

Hairy Thunderer laughed. It was the ugliest laugh Lone Arrow had ever heard.

"A thought came to me when you killed that spider outside your door," said Lone Arrow. "A spider was outside my door, too, and I did not kill it."

"Is that your medicine?" asked Hairy Thunderer, and the mouth twisted in the hair.

"It is part of my medicine. I think that if the strong one hurts the weak one, the strong one becomes weak."

Hairy Thunderer leaned close to his staff. "You are as weak to me as that spider was when I killed it."

"Your medicine strikes weak enemies," said Lone Arrow. "My medicine strikes strong enemies and makes them weak."

Hairy Thunderer laughed again. "This medicine talk is foolish," he said. "I do not believe in such talk, as your people do. My things, that seem strange and powerful to you, are natural things. All my people have thunder staffs and fire-drink."

"Then they are an evil people," said Lone Arrow boldly.

"In some ways they are an evil people. Yet," said Hairy Thunderer grinned with his teeth, "they felt I was more evil still. They drove me out. That is why I came here."

"It was a bad day for us when you came," Lone Arrow said.

"Maybe. But here I am. I do not need medicine to make myself stronger than you and all your people. You were a fool to come here."

Lone Arrow sat down on the other side of the fire. As in his own lodge, he felt there was movement near him, of long, thin, shadowy legs. He kept his eyes on Hairy Thunderer.

"What is your name?" Hairy Thunderer asked.

"You know my name. It is Lone Arrow."

"It says you are a fool. You are alone and weak, as an arrow is weak before my thunder staff. Your foolishness makes me angry. You are the only man of your people foolish enough to do that."

"If all the men of my people came here together, you would be crushed as you crushed that little spider."

"But they do not dare come together and crush me," said Hairy Thunderer.

"Maybe another strength gathers itself," said Lone Arrow.

"Hai!" Hairy Thunderer made his teeth shine. "Do you call the little spider-people against me?"

"It is strange that you say that. One spider is small and weak and knows nothing. But," asked Lone Arrow, "if all the strength and wisdom of all the spiders came together—"

"You are a fool," said Hairy Thunderer. "Go away."

"No."

Hairy Thunderer laughed, as wolves laugh over their meat.

"You trust your medicine," he mocked.

"My medicine is upon you."

"I tell you again to go away," said Hairy Thunderer. He put his

hand on the thunder staff. "I will not tell you a third time."

"I will stay," said Lone Arrow.

Then Hairy Thunderer spoke a word in his own strange tongue that must have been an angry word of evil. His hand snatched at his weapon, to lift it and point it.

But he did not lift it.

He pulled. The thunder staff stayed, as if it had grown there. Hairy Thunderer looked and said again the word of angry evil, and Lone Arrow, too, looked.

Strong shining bands fastened the thunder staff, crossing it from side to side, this way and that, to hold it to the wall. When Hairy Thunderer tried to let go he could not.

His hand was caught in a loop of the shining cord.

Then Lone Arrow felt again the presence of the shadows near him. He began to sing the strongest medicine song he knew.

Hairy Thunderer pulled and struggled. His eyes were round and full of fear in the firelight. He turned his shaggy face to Lone Arrow. "Help me!" he cried.

From a dark corner floated a loop of the cord, and it caught Hairy Thunderer around the body and drew tight. Another loop bound him like that. Another. Hairy Thunderer was wrapped so that his arms and legs were helpless.

He was like a fly in a spider's web.

Then from the darkest part of the lodge moved the jointed legs, and a black body moved among them.

Lone Arrow saw the legs, and their joints like the strong bent roots of a tree. The body was as big as a buffalo bull, and like a buffalo bull was the dark, shaggy hair. The head was round and black, with many bright eyes. Jaws like curved, sharp buffalo horns moved apart, and then together, and then apart again.

Its feet held the cords that bound and held Hairy Thunderer. Its eyes were looking at Hairy Thunderer. It flung another loop to bind him. It dragged him toward itself, and its jaws opened.

Hairy Thunderer was crying, like a frightened child who dreams bad things.

"Save me!" he cried to Lone Arrow. "Have pity!"

At that word, Lone Arrow's heart was cool and quiet. He stood up from where he sat.

"No, brother," he said to the giant spider. "No."

The big shape stood still, holding Hairy Thunderer bound and helpless.

"I have said that the strength and wisdom of all spiders could come together," said Lone Arrow. "You are stronger than he is. You are wiser. You know that to strike the weak is a weakness."

It stood still. It listened. Its eyes knew Lone Arrow's words.

"My strength spared weakness, and your strength came to help me," said Lone Arrow. "Let your strength spare weakness."

It stood still. Lone Arrow stepped around the fire. His knife was in his hand, and he cut the shining cords. Hairy Thunderer almost fell, but Lone Arrow caught him and held him on his feet.

"Can you walk?" he asked, and Hairy Thunderer nodded his head.

"Then walk," Lone Arrow told him. "Walk fast and far."

Hairy Thunderer stumbled to the door and out. Lone Arrow looked at the big spider, and the big spider looked back at him.

"Hai-ya!" said Lone Arrow. "It was a big thing for me to call you, and it was a big thing for you to answer. You are all the spiders and all their strength and wisdom. Brother, I thank you. I will remember you and thank you as long as I live."

It was fading, like smoke that blows away. He could see through it. He saw it get thin and faint. Its jointed legs went, and last of all its shining eyes.

"Thank you," Lone Arrow said into the nothing-place where it had gone. "Like you, I will pity the weak all my life. Thank you."

Then the people woke in their beds, to see the night turned bright red with fire.

Tall Elk and some others ran out. Hairy Thunderer's lodge was burning. The dried mud fell from its flaming poles, and all things inside were eaten by the fire. There were loud noises, as the dust that made the thunder staff speak caught fire and burned up. Lone Arrow pushed the moving thing on shields to where the flames could catch it. He cut the ropes that held Hairy Thunderer's two big riding animals and slapped their sides with his hand.

"Go!" he shouted, and they ran off under the moon. Then Lone Arrow turned and spoke to his people.

"Hairy Thunderer is gone," he

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told them. "I said for him to go away, and he went."

He pointed to some things that were piled away from the burning lodge. "I brought out the skins and furs and the meat," he said. "We will eat and be warm until we can find more game."

"The fire-drink," Tall Elk started to say, and then stopped, because his mouth was dry.

"It has burned in there." Lone Arrow pointed into the hottest part of the fire. "It made a blue light instead of a red one. The thunder staff is gone, too, and all the strangeness. I saved only our own things, that were given to Hairy Thunderer and that belong to us."

"If there is no more fire-drink," another man tried to say.

"If there is no more," Lone Arrow replied, "and nobody knows how to make it, men will learn to do without it."

They looked at him, feeling thirst, but they knew that was the truth.

"Tall Elk," Lone Arrow said then, "your daughter, Lost Leaf, is in my lodge. You told her to go to Hairy Thunderer, but she came to me. He is gone. Lost Leaf is mine."

He turned away and went back to his lodge. He stooped low under the spider web at the door. Nobody saw him or Lost Leaf any more until the next morning.

In the days that came, the people found that what Lost Arrow said was true. The thirst for the fire-drink went from them. They hunted as they had hunted before Hairy Thunderer came, and the skins and meat were for themselves and their women and children. The old happiness and peace was theirs again.

Lone Arrow became a great medicine man, and Lost Leaf was his beloved woman. On their lodge they painted the picture of a web with a black spider in the middle of it. Some people thought the picture was ugly, but Lone Arrow said he would put a terrible curse on anyone who ever killed a spider.

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Security had not liked it, but Dr. Mason had insisted on a boat. What, after all, could happen to him on a calm and empty sea?

Ringer

by G. C. Edmondson

AFTER SUCH A PROMISING BEginning, Dr. Mason's perfect day was ruined. There was no ignoring the object in front of him. He supposed it served him right, after all the vitriolic ridicule he'd heaped on Security. Half guiltily, he looked over his shoulder but the tail was not there—after all the trouble Dr. Mason had taken to lose him, it was hardly to be expected that he would be.

Since Mason was a bachelor on the far side of middle age and not given to illicit love affairs, his tail had caused him no great inconvenience; but he had been annoying.

Then there was the question of the boat.

"We can't let you go sailing out in that ocean all alone," the security officer had protested. "Why, there could be a Soviet submarine —anything!"

"No sailing, no work," Dr. Mason had said, and since he was top man in his field the government had grudgingly given in. By now the government was used to mad scientists. The ironic part of it was that the place where Dr. Mason and his colleagues performed their highly secret mumbo-jumbo was jestingly known as the Saucer Works.

After a Friday no more nerve-wracking than others, Dr. Mason had hurried down to the dock and raised sail. He ate his Spartan supper belowdecks while the well balanced rig tacked itself seaward into the evening breeze. Right on schedule as he reached the visibility limit of shore-based binoculars, the helicopter took off and fluttered gently in his direction.

With a grin Dr. Mason peered out of his tiny porthole at the fogbank which rolled toward his hard-driving little sloop. When the copter's flutter faded away he knew the fog was mast high and they had once again lost him. A petty victory, but a man has to fight for

some things. He lit his pipe and exhaled clouds of pure gloat.

And now this!

At first he had thought it was a buoy gone adrift. It was round and reasonably flat, but it was clean of barnacles and other sea growth. With a feeling of mounting excitement he had realized what it was—and also that there was no such thing.

He sat in the cockpit and stared at it. Nothing happened. After a while he tied up to it with a line thin enough to break in the event of a sudden ascension. Even a flying saucer can become boring if the weather persists damp and raw and nothing happens for an hour. He knocked out his pipe and went below.

When he woke again, the sun was at 8 o'cock and the fog nearly burned away. A small hatch opened aboard the saucer and a man looked out at him. "Hi," the man said, "Coffee's ready. Come aboard."

This isn't really happening, Dr. Mason told himself, but he checked the line anyway. It was slightly frayed so he cut it loose and tied with a heavier one. Then he stepped into the saucer.

The man poured two cups of coffee and dished up two plates of bacon and eggs. After a moment he served toast. "Cream?" the man asked.

Mason nodded.

"Sugar?"

He nodded again.

They breakfasted in companionable silence. Afterward he lit his pipe and the other man produced an oddly proportioned cigarette. "Well?" the other asked.

"I was about to ask you the same question."

"Could you please be more specific?"

"Let's put it this way," Mason said. "Due to certain unusual qualifications, I know you're not from Earth. Your equipment was not manufactured in the U.S. and your ability with bacon and eggs plus coffee is most assuredly not Russian. Ergo . . ."

"That does away with tiresome explanations," the other said gratefully. "You're Kurt Mason, the big wheel of a certain laboratory." It was a statement, not a question. "You work too hard. If you don't watch your step you'll make a discovery pretty soon. We'd just as soon you didn't."

"Can't anybody let a scientist alone?" Mason growled. "Who do you represent anyway?"

"It was scientists," the stranger said, "who undermined the old concept of an anthropomorphic god. When the Day of Jubilo was proclaimed at Los Alamos, the theologically dispossessed seized upon saucer sightings to formulate the hypothesis of an elder race—a gaggle of benign supermen who would scoop them out of trouble a microsecond before vaporization."

"Oh come now—" Mason began.

"So the new god's helpers don't use wings. Very inefficient *in vacuo.*"

Dr. Mason bowed ironically. "First time I've ever met an angel," he said. "Were those psychoceramics right about the elder race?"

"Psychoceramics? That wasn't in my vocab tape."

"Crackpots," Mason explained. "Exactly what do you want?"

"Let's put it this way. I get five demerits every time somebody spoils a planet in my sector. So it's time you took a rest."

"Do I have a choice?"

"Not much. Take a look in that mirror."

Mason stepped to a full-length mirror. There was a blurry instant, then his double stepped out of the mirror.

"Meet your replacement," the angel said.

"Just where do I go while I'm being replaced?"

"We'll find a place for you."

"I just bet you will," Mason grunted. He thought fleetingly of the last Yahi Indian who spent half his life fletching arrows and making fire without matches for goggling anthropologists. "Is he a perfect copy?" he asked.

"Almost. Like most mirror images, he's reversed. You're left handed so he'll be right. I doubt if anyone notices the difference."

Without warning Mason reached over the table and clouted the angel with the heavy coffee cup. The angel went down like a bathysphere. Mason turned to face his double and swung the cup again. As precisely as a mirror image, the double swung at him. They both connected.

When Mason came to, his double and the angel were struggling to their feet. He picked up the coffee cup and administered another soporific to each.

The sloop was still moored outside. He clambered aboard and rummaged through the after locker for bits of line. When he returned the other two were still out. He trussed them like a pair of mummies. Minutes later the sloop was on a broad reach back to the harbor and getting a little extra kick from the outboard. An hour later Dr. Mason thought he saw something flash overhead, but since that joker in New Mexico had been insisting that green fireballs in horizontal trajectory were nothing but meteorites, he couldn't be sure what it was. He made his landfall and began the long reach up the bay. The incident was acquiring a dreamlike quality already.

That evening he took a long and thoughtful walk along the cliffs, noting with minor annoyance that a stroller kept his distance but invariably walked the same way he did.

Dr. Mason made a few more

contributions to the lab's program but in time it was decided that he'd burned himself out. They kicked him upstairs. Even though no longer useful in research, he proved an able administrator. His coordination isn't what it used to be. Getting old and all that. Sometimes he absently starts scribbling with the wrong hand. He wonders if the mirror incident had anything to do with it. But by now he isn't sure whether he dreamed it or maybe read it somewhere.

He keeps a large can of oil aboard the sloop and when he's far to sea, beyond the reach of Security, he takes off his arms and legs to oil them. He doesn't think it odd, but he's afraid Security might.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXV

In 3270, Ferdinand Feghoot's star-drive broke down while he and a person named Lodowick Goor were serving as Couriers for the Greater Galactic Th'lgian Empire. With the ship helplessly drifting, he struggled to make the repairs. In three weeks the food was exhausted, and they faced seemingly certain starvation. Soon the unhappy Goor was eyeing the diplomatic pouch hungrily.

Th'lgian tradition demanded that all official despatches be written on *xx'tti,* which when boiled tastes simply delicious to all known life-forms. Terrans, however, were so vulnerable to alien diseases that even out in deep space they were forbidden to eat any foods not grown on Earth. Violators were stripped of their citizenship and perpetually exiled from their native planet. That was why the Th'lgi trusted Earthmen as Imperial Couriers.

Goor had, of course, been solemnly warned—but hunger was too much for the man. On the fifth day, while Feghoot was working, he sneaked the despatches into the galley, boiled them, and devoured them greedily.

Feghoot, returning after having repaired the drive, saw at once what had happened. He stared at his shipmate in pity and horror. "Goor!" he cried out. "Do you know what you've *done?* You have sold your Earthright for a pot of message!"

—Grendel Briarton

Grampa had been ten years old when the guns set up a yattering at Gettysburg—seems as though he had a right to sit on his own porch by now if he was of a mind to . . .

THE WRENS IN GRAMPA'S WHISKERS

by Edgar Pangborn

I CALLED MY GRANDFATHER Grandad. His father was the one we called Grampa. Grandad was old as a man needs to be, or I thought so in 1958, when I was ten. As for Grampa, he'd been ten years old himself when the little big guns set up a yattering at Gettysburg. Grandpa used to say guns had been growing bigger ever since, but the way he heard it, the ones at Gettysburg killed the soldiers just as dead. It must have been in 1958 when I last heard him make that remark, the summer he was 106 and had decided to sit out on the front porch near-about as long as he pleased.

Grampa had worked hard for his first eighty-odd years, twitching rocks out of the Vermont dirt the way his grandfather had done before him; then he slowed down. He'd always been clean-shaven. At eighty-two he grew a beard, took to reading a lot, on the front porch. "Built the thing myself," he said, "with underpinnings of hornbeam. Believe I can set on it some if I wish, at the commencement of my old age."

He could. He had three other sons besides Grandad, who was 81 the year I'm talking of, and the others pretty well-grown too. There were seven grandsons in the direct line, my Pop the youngest, and a flock of granddaughters and great-grands fairly well scattered over the eastern States. Anything the rest of the tribe couldn't fix to run right, my Ma could. No reason Grampa shouldn't subside if he chose.

One June evening in '58 when Grampa was out on the front porch, Ma called to tell him supper was ready. "Fine," he says, "where is it?"

Ma spoke through the window: "You trying to plague me, Grampa? Right here same as usual, so come and get it!"

Grampa just set. Ma went out to study him. "You all right?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" says Grampa. "Never sick a day in my life. Could lick my weight in wildcats, excepting I'm that ornery I'd more likely let 'em live and grieve. Where's my supper?"

Ma was young then as well as handsome. I was surveying the scene through the window because I smelt the unusual. I saw the handsome in Ma pepper up to a sort of glow—after an average fourteen-hour day Ma might have been a mite tired herself. She softened, though. She always did. "Is it your eyes gone back on you, Grampa, account of all that reading you've been doing? Why'n't you say so?"

"Judy, girl—" Ma's given name was Lyle, but Grampa made no never-minds about that, and would call her Judy, or Millicent, or Beulah, all good family names he'd known at one time or another—"Judy, long's you got nothing better to do than stand there, will you enlighten me why the good Lord made women with arguing organs? When's there been anything wrong with my eyes? Ain't I setting here on the same porch I built in 1913 with underpinnings of hornbeam, and got Mount Mansfield before my eyes plain as you be, which I don't mean that the way it sounds, for you're a good-looking heifer and no mistake, not to mention two-thirds of Lamoille County and all of it pretty as a picture? Eyes! I'm partial to having supper on time, by the way—always was."

That was a hazy evening. Mount Mansfield—why, you couldn't see him, not even a rising shadow of him in the mist that was spread all over the far side of yonder. Ma brought Grampa his supper on the porch. When he was done munching, which he did hearty, she carried in the dishes and not a word of complaint.

The mist thinned when it came on dark. Chilly, but I remember the fireflies circulating. Ma fetched a blanket, and Grampa thanked her for it but wouldn't allow her to tuck it around him, because he said that might disturb the wrens that had made a nest in his whiskers.

"Wrens," said Ma. "Ayah, there's been a pile of 'em around."

"Oh, there has, you know," says Grampa. "I figure these got crowded out of the best places, seeing my eldest boy Joel has been too shiftless lately to put up more houses for 'em." He meant Grandad, and it was a mite unfair, because Grandad at 81 was entitled to slow down some himself. "These birds'll be all right though, Judy," says Grampa, "if you'll just leave me set, and not bother, and not argue, and while you're about it you might fetch me a couple-three conveniences."

My room overlooked the roof of the front porch. When I'd gone to bed I heard Ma trying again. No

use—Grampa wasn't intending to move. She sat with him a spell, and Pop joined them. While I dozed off I heard the three of them talking about the war. That was 1958, but some-way Grampa never got it through his head the war was over. You couldn't always be sure whether he meant the war in the 1940s or the first World War, or maybe even the Spanish War when Grampa might have admired to take a ride up San Juan Hill with Teddy Roosevelt, only they told him at the time that he was a shade too old for such. But that June night, the first one he spent out on the porch, I believe he was talking about the second World War, for while I was dropping off I heard him say you couldn't leave a man like Hitler running loose—Teddy would never have allowed it.

I woke later in the night and heard him snoring—gently for him, which I figured was on account of the wrens. I skun out over the roof and down the porch pillar, careful in case he quit snoring—not that I ever felt scared of Grampa the way some did—I just wanted a look at the wrens.

The mist wasn't quite gone. It was a night of small stars and a high-riding sliver of moon in a milky haze. Being ten and foolish, I was on the porch and beside Grampa's chair before I realized there'd be no seeing the wrens in such a light. He woke and said: "That you, Saul?"

"Uhha," I said, "it's just me." Peculiar thing—Grampa was forever tangling up the names of Ma, and Pop, and plenty more. As for Pop's brothers and the great-grands, Grampa didn't even try—he called them all Jackson. Someway, though, my name always came out right. Well, I'd been underfoot for ten years in the same house with him, and I guess it helped to know my right name whenever he stumbled over me and needed to say something brisk. "It's just me, Grampa," I said. "I wanted to see the wrens."

"Why, Saul," he says, "the best time for that is real early morning before anyone else is up. Say an hour before sun-up, that's when they begin a-twirping and a-fidgeting but don't feel like flying yet, so if you was on hand at exactly that right time, I wouldn't be a one to say you *couldn't* see 'em, understand? Meanwhile I'd admire to learn if you can shinny up that pillar as good as you can shinny down it, and how about doing it nearabout as fast as you know how to shinny, before your Ma pops out and gives me an argument about growing boys needing their sleep?"

So I did.

All summer long I kept trying to hit the time exactly right. I didn't have much luck. I'd sneak down too early and he'd send me back, or I'd be late and he'd give me hark-from-the-tomb for being too lazy to get up early the way he used to.

One of the mornings when I was too early he said: "Oh, by the way, Saul, wasn't you telling me your Great-Aunt Doreen went and lost that amethyst brooch she had from Cousin John Blaine before they was married?"

"Why," I says, a leg on each side of the pillar and my bare toes working because I was puzzled, "why, no, I wasn't, Grampa, but it's a fact. She was in a mortal taking about it all last evening, said it was one of the mighty few things she had to remember him by and didn't understand how she could've been that careless."

"Ayah, well, it come to me the thing likely fell off into the back of her closet, account she forgot to take it off when she hung up her dress and didn't have it pinned on too good. Thought I'd mention it."

I found it right there, next day, and took off after Aunt Doreen, figuring I'd say the bandits got it and I wrested it away from them single-handed like. Or maybe I'd tease her some and claim she'd stuck it on the back of her dress and folks'd been admiring it. I located her in the kitchen shelling garden peas, red-eyed still and distracted, half the peas going on the floor, and some-way none of my projects looked good. Aunt Doreen was shaped like a little Rocky Ford melon and nice all through. I coudn't think, so I said without thinking: "Know what, Aunt Doreen? I believe you left your window-screen open yesterday morning."

"My screen, honey?" she says. "Guess I did. Yes, I washed the glass, likely forgot the screen, I'm that careless," and she went to crying again, about the brooch. I remember there was a mess of wrens twittering around the kitchen window—appeared to be wrens.

I went on talking without thinking: "Well, Aunt Doreen, yesterday I happened to see one of them plague-take-it starlings go in your window and fly off with something, didn't pay it no mind, only today I got to thinking and had a look under the tree where he lit, so here she be. You wasn't careless, it was just one of them plague-take-it starlings."

She grabbed the brooch, and then me, kissed me all to pieces. While I was picking up the peas that were flying around she went into a long story about how the starlings had pestered her and John when they was first married and living over to Lodi, New York —starling's being liable to do anything. So I knew she believed me. Don't know as I ever told a handsomer lie, or got more glory for it and did less harm. Peculiar thing though, how it sprung up full-grown in my empty head while those wrens were busy at the window. Near-about as peculiar as Grampa's knowing where the brooch was, when he hadn't been off the porch in a week and would-

n't've been found dead anywhere near a closet with female clothes in it. I know Grampa expected me to ask about that, but of course, seeing he hadn't let me look at the wrens, I was durned if I would.

But then there was just one morning in late July, when I hit the time so near right I figured I'd give up on it if Grampa still wouldn't let me see them. Pale early light, a few birds starting to talk in the woods, no big chorus yet. Light enough so that Grampa's eyes had begun to shine a natural robin's-egg blue instead of black, and I could make out only about half of the million crinkles around them. The old man had to admit I wasn't more than sixty seconds off, so he showed me a dark spot in the white fluff spreading over his chest, and he said if I'd stand quiet and just look down, not poke around or stir up a commotion. Maybe I'd see something, maybe I wouldn't.

All I saw down there was bit of motion. Naturally the nest itself was away inside the beard, for snugness. I couldn't swear they were wrens, although at the time I took his word for it. I'd no more than glimpsed that motion when Grampa said the parent birds were ready to fly, so I'd have to travel back up the pillar and stop bothering. But he suggested that if I was to squat on the porch roof same as if I had good sense, I just might watch them going off. I did that, and I think I caught a faint flicker of them flying west and beyond our lilac hedge. Flying sort of like wrens.

Through August I didn't try, much. It came to me that he thought I was too young, and I was said about that, but it was the kind of thing where you didn't put up an argument, not with Grampa.

Along in August, Ma and Pop arranged for Dr. Wayne to come and see Grampa. Grampa was friendly—called the doctor Jackson and explained how the only reason he'd quit asking for half a dozen sausages along with his lunch was that the smell bothered the wrens, it didn't mean he was off his feed. Soon as Dr. Wayne got wound up to saying "Well, now—" Grampa admitted real polite that lack of exercise had whittled down his appetite, a smidgin. "But," says he, "ain't that natural, Jackson? I'm commencing to get old is the hell of it, and anyway I hate an argument." After Wayne left, Grampa asked Pop to bring him his shotgun.

Pop says: "Now look, Grampa—"

"Wheels of the Apocalypse!" says Grampa. "Am I asking you for shells? Did I say a word about shooting anybody? All I want is the gun, and all I want to do is point it, the next time I see a doctor fussing around my wrens—you think he won't travel? He'll travel. Fetch me my shotgun, Jackson, or I'll commence to believe Judy there has

learnt you how to argue, and any that'll let his wife learn him to argue would suck wrens' eggs."

So he got his shotgun. Set it by his chair. I remember seeing him pat it and fondle it and shoo away the cat with it now and then. If he was feeling good he'd tell how he bought it in 1913 at Hones' Hardware—damn filling station now where Hines' Hardware used to stand, they call that progress?—and that was the same year he built this porch with underpinnings of hornbeam.

Word got around. If people smell something unusual you just can't make them quit bothering. Not that they didn't have a few fairly smart ideas. There was my Great-Uncle Jonas for instance, Grandad's kid brother, 78 that year, fat, with a gimp leg and a curious disposition. In August he started talking politics to Grandpa. Grampa didn't mind—he enjoyed politics, and let Jonas wheeze along on one lungfull after another till he got to the point: "How you going to vote this year, Grandpa?"

"How? You parted with your natural senses, boy? When'd you ever know me vote any way except straight Republican? Sooner vote for Coolidge, only I hear he's dead, but it don't matter, this Willkie's a good man, got a lot of sense. Use your head, Jonas."

"Ayah, well, but that wasn't what I meant. I was wondering—"

"You got any occasion to wonder about a man's politics that would've rid up San Juan Hill only they told him he was too old for God's sake?"

"It ain't that, Grampa." His own father, but Great-Uncle Jonas called him Grampa—the old man wouldn't answer to anything else. "Thing of it is, I just wondered—"

"You needn't to wonder. It come to me," said Grampa, "that I been paying taxes in this town since the year 1873, and never been in jail so far as I recall—well, there was something about shooting up a street-lamp for rejoicing the day they repealed the Volstead Commandment, and you should've been there yourself only I guess you was still working in the bank that year and kind of surrounded with virtue—I don't hold it against you, Jackson, I mean Jonas. Thing of it is, Jonas, if after all them taxes and never being in jail, this town is so hell-fired puky small and mean they can't wheel one of them newfangled voting machines onto Joe Durvis's truck and fetch it up here for me—"

"Now just a minute, Grampa," says Great-Uncle Jonas, "the Selectmen wouldn't ever hear of it, you know that."

"Because if they won't," says Grampa, not listening "and far as that goes Joe Durvis'd be perfectly glad to do it for a dollar—if they won't, I'm fixing to stay home and vote socialist, and it won't be ten minutes before the entire county gets to hear about it."

I don't know what they would've done come November. Long before then, Ma and Pop started worrying about something else—September frost. Grandad helped them worry, stumping around chewing his own short whiskers and remarking how the nights were already sharp and drawing in. Grampa overheard him—was meant to, likely.

"Joel boy," says Grampa, mild and gentle for him, "I'd quit a-fretting if I was you. They're fixing to go south any time now."

"That a fact?" says Grandad. Ma was behind Grandad twisting her fingers in her apron which she seldom did, and I was there, not underfoot, just listening. Aunt Doreen came out too. I couldn't look at Aunt Doreen those days without she'd finger the amethyst brooch and smile half-secret at me and muss my hair on the sly.

"Ayah," says Grampa, "or if they don't you can close in the porch—with blankets and thumbtacks, mind, I won't have no hammering around my wrens—and we'll make out with suet and birdseed. But I look for 'em to fly south real soon."

"It would be a dispensation—" said Ma— "almost." She said that soft. I guess Grampa didn't hear, anyhow he paid it no mind.

"We've raised three broods," Grampa said. "Three broods, by God. That's unusual, that is. What's the war news?"

Ma told him it was good, and went on to say something about the satellites, which didn't interest Grampa too much. He knew what they were, but claimed it was a waste of time flying the hell all over space when there was still a pile of things down here that could stand fixing if only people weren't too shiftless to notice it.

"Well, bother the war news too," says Aunt Doreen. "People could live in peace if they'd mind their own business and learn not to get careless . . ."

Pop laid in extra blankets and bought an electric heater on the quiet, but the following week was balmy, no more said about winter. During that week my best friend Will Burke told me something about his kid sister Jenny. Jenny was seven, and she'd had polio the year before, right leg and hip all twisted up and miserable. Dr. Wayne couldn't give the Burkes any hope she'd ever walk right or even walk at all. Will told me she was walking.

He'd fetched something to her room and found her out of bed, where she could grab the bedpost if she needed it but standing without it and taking a step or two. She said she'd been as far as the window and back. She made Will swear not to tell the family till she was sure it was real. When Will told me, I had to swear, too, never to mention it—I wouldn't now, only Jenny's been dead some years, anyhow I can't imagine she'd have

minded. And she made Will promise to see that her window-screen was kept unlocked so the birds could get in.

Will did that—he'd have done anything for Jenny—but he never got to see the birds. I remember he was shook up when he told me. Some-way I had sense enough not to suggest Jenny was making it up. She'd said they probably weren't exactly birds, though they looked like it when they folded their arms in under the feathers. Birds, Jenny figured, don't have triangular green eyes on knobby little heads, and they sure enough don't have the sense to bring along a pointed branch and use it for levering up a window-screen.

They sang now and then, she told Will, but not quite like birds. More like a kind of talking, if you could only understand it. Which is about the way I felt when the wrens, if you want to call them wrens, were chirping me that 24-carat chunk of mahooha about the brooch and the starling.

Peculiar thing—later on Jenny forgot about the birds, or seemed to. I suppose you're bound to forget a lot of things that happened when you were seven. And of course people forget things that happen when they're older too. Like for instance the time—seems to me it was the following summer—when Joe Durvis and old Martin Smallways who'd been a-snarling and a-feuding over a line fence dispute for twenty-six years appeared to forget all about it. People saw them meet sudden on the green, and supposed it meant trouble, and the small boys and dogs began drifting in so as not to miss anything. But the two of them just look sort of puzzled, and here's old Martin scratching his bald head and saying, "Hiya, Joe—was you heading for the Ethan Allen?" Off they go to the inn and spend the evening crying into each other's beer happy as two boiled owls. People said there was a lot of wrens around that year too. I don't remember seeing any more than usual. Real wrens, I mean.

It did turn chilly that September of 1958. The morning after the first frost Grampa seemed peart enough. "They flew south yesterday evening," he said to Ma, "same as I foretold, and I got to admit I'm obliged to you for your patience with me and my wrens."

I wasn't on the porch. Ma told me about it. She didn't give me the whole story till much later, when I was going-on sixteen and she figured I might own a little sense in off-hours when I wasn't sparking around with Jenny Burke, who was walking as well as anyone by that time and pretty enough to make you cry. "He showed me," Ma said, "the place where he claimed the wrens nested. Spread out his beard and showed me—well, it's only the truth, Saul, there was a kind of little hollowed-out place,

smooth like a bird's nest. Likely he could've made it himself working his fingers around in there, I wouldn't know. He showed me that, and he said to me, 'We raised three broods,' he says. 'Three broods, and that's unusual.' Then he asked me what the war news was. I guess I said it was good, and he kind of chuckled, he wasn't paying me much mind, Saul. He was that quiet, a-gazing off at Mount Mansfield, it was a long couple-three minutes before I understood he was gone."

Yes, that seems long ago, back there in 1958, but this happens to be the same porch with hardly a thing changed, that my great-grandfather built with underpinnings of hornbeam, and I can't think of any reason why I shouldn't sit here myself a while at the commencement of my old age. I'd rather you didn't look now, because the light's wrong and I think they've gone to bed, anyway I can't assert I understand them better than Grampa did, or as well.

I've been around, traveled more than he did. Seen plenty of trouble even though we don't have wars any more—trouble and hating and confusion and this and that, including plenty of people who don't get over things like polio miracle-style, the way my Jenny did.

Peculiar thing, how she forgot about the birds. Maybe at first she just wasn't a-mind to speak of them because of the way people would look at her if she did, but later I think it was a real forgetting, for I don't believe she'd have shied off from speaking to me about them after we'd been married forty-five years. Never brought it up myself of course, being I'd given Will my word I wouldn't mention it.

I've been around, seen a lot. Classmate of mine was one of the first on Venus. Never did get upstairs myself—just here and there, setting my hand to whatever turned up.

No, I wouldn't be a one to tell you what they look like. If you was going to say I imagine them, I don't mind. I'd want to claim though, that if you mess around for a century or so trying to do things more or less right, you can maybe make a place for some little spark of wisdom with wings on it.

Herr Payk was a most fortunate man—he made a discovery concerning the secret inter-relationship of all things which promised to open up to him vast vistas of knowledge and, resultantly, power. The research involved was both lengthy and, to a degree, tedious, however—and the results were really quite unpredictable. . . .

A CERTAIN ROOM

by Kurt Kusenberg

(translated by Therese Pol)

A RATHER PECULIAR, IF NOT DOWNright disreputable, gentleman by the name of Payk (he traded in waterbugs, tame beavers, and young women, not necessarily in that order) had discovered that in a certain room in our town more invisible threads came together than in any other place in the world. The influences of all earthly things upon one another are much more powerful than is generally assumed; but because this constant reciprocal action takes place in such secrecy, little is known about it. If we were to exaggerate, we might simply say that everything is intimately connected with everything else, but this is not entirely true. The secret web that is spun all around us has stronger and weaker parts. Sometimes the threads merely cross each other, but occasionally they form a knot.

The room of which we speak was such a knot.

How Herr Payk had come to learn about the existence of this secret knot, we do not know. The chances are that he felt out the whole web, testing and disregarding the smaller entanglements, thread by thread, till finally he put his finger on the decisive spot. Here, a myriad of threads merged and the disturbing thing about them was that they all stretched infinitely far: they circled the globe and the universe.

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The room belonged to the apartment of a certain Herr Klose, a modest citizen, and was seldom used by him or his family, to avoid wear and tear. It was the parlor, and only on Sundays saw a little sociability; on other days it was opened only when Herr Klose's daughter practiced on the upright piano. How good and how evil the room was, above all how powerful, no one suspected. Herr Payk alone knew it and, during the time when he was still a reasonably welcome guest at the house, he had originated many a world event from this uncanny communication center. He had observed that if any object in the room was moved—lifted up, shifted, or even brushed against—a current would pass through the spectral threads and set in motion both small and large happenings, far, far removed in space.

For instance, each time a flower vase containing artificial lilies was turned around it made the Yellow River in China overflow and caused great damage. If a finger touched the F-sharp key on the piano, there would be a sudden epidemic of smallpox in New Zealand, and no doctor had any inkling why. But the room not only brought forth harmful manifestations—it also could produce good ones. If someone tugged lightly at the crocheted tablecloth, the fishermen in Norway would announce an abundant catch; but, if he pulled hard, a blizzard would be loosed over Canada.

The reader may want to know precisely how all this play and interplay was revealed to Herr Payk. Well, it happened in a very strange way, and his manner of reasoning before he gained this insight can never be reconstructed. All we know is that there is a certain wooden fence in town on which the inhabitants are in the habit of pinning notices whenever they want to trade or sell something, or whenever they have lost an object or a dog . . . and on this fence there suddenly began to appear small pieces of paper with red-penciled notations such as:

WOUND UP WATCH—
LOCUST PLAGUE IN SIAM

BRUSHED CARPET—
COUP D'ETAT IN ARGENTINA

OPENED LEFT-HAND WINDOW
—INCREASE OF SUNSPOTS

and the like. No one could guess what all this meant . . . except Herr Payk. He copied the notations and carefully entered them at home in a notebook. He never found out who pinned on or removed the pieces of paper, although he lay in wait for days on end, and for many a night never took his eyes off the wooden fence.

For a long time all had gone well. Sundays or even during the week, when he was still accepted

as a guest in the Klose household, Herr Payk had had occasion to handle the objects in the room. Then he was able to read from the wooden fence what happened afterward, and serenely compiled a catalogue of all events, disastrous or otherwise, emanating from this room. We should say, *almost* all events, because, before the catalogue was completed, Herr Klose quarreled with Herr Payk and forbade him the house, or, rather, the apartment, for the house did not belong to him but to a Herr Treufler, of whom, however, nothing further need be said here.

The reason for the quarrel which put such an abrupt end to Herr Payk's experiments was that he had been pretending he wanted to marry Herr Klose's daughter, the same young woman who practiced the piano. But since Herr Payk's intentions were not really serious, the engagement lasted forever—almost as long as a marriage nowadays—without ever leading to matrimony. Impatient and suspicious, Herr Klose started tracing the causes of this dismal delay and discovered that Herr Payk was living with a fat, rich widow. Since he could not know what really fascinated Herr Payk about his household, he assumed that he was a lecher who wanted to seduce his daughter, for the sake of variety. He was so outraged by Herr Payk's conduct that he closed his door to the suitor forever, at the risk of finding no one else.

This break made it extraordinarily difficult for Herr Payk to pursue his investigations. He knew in a general way what was done in the room and what happened as a result. But what was more important to him now was to fill in certain details. Needless to say, he also missed the sense of power he used to feel whenever he originated events from this secret command post. The Klose family were originating events all the time, but didn't realize what they were doing and so got nothing out of it, for power can only be savored consciously.

Of course, Herr Payk could have asked one of his acquaintances who was also a friend of the Kloses to touch or shift certain objects in that room. But such a request might have been received with bewilderment; it might even have roused suspicion in the other person's mind that there was something wrong with Herr Klose's parlor. And this Herr Payk wanted to avoid at all costs.

Anyway, there was a good deal more to be explained. Herr Payk did not insist on finding out what would happen if one poked at the wire springs in the upholstered chairs, because he presumed that this would have only a negligible result. On the other hand, he would have given his right eye to know what a small, hideous-look-

ing ash tray was capable of, and whether or not the right-hand candle holder on the upright piano could exercise remote control. So far he had not discovered if these two objects had to be shifted, rubbed, or manipulated in some other way to release their power.

It was such fine points that counted now. For the web of the world is infinitely finely spun.

Eventually, however, Herr Payk found an intermediary who was at once so stupid and so discreet that he could ask him without any explanation to try his luck with these two objects. Three times—it took three weeks, because the visitor was received only on Sundays—the man busied himself with the ash tray. Nothing happened. It was only when, chatting and smoking, he filled it with cigar ash that a notice on the fence announced that the mayor of Bayonne had sprained his arm. It was a novelty to find minor incidents emanating from the room and involving individual persons. Herr Payk reluctantly admitted to himself that his catalogue was nowhere near complete. In future he would have to experiment with each object much more thoroughly and track down even trifling results.

He had a feeling that he had reached a turning point when he asked his messenger to light the right-hand candle on Klose's upright piano during his next visit. The first time this was attempted the candle was not actually lighted, because Herr Klose was thrifty and could not understand why one should burn a candle in bright daylight. But on the second Sunday, when Herr Klose briefly left the room, the undertaking succeeded. The candle burned and Herr Payk, although he was not present, felt an instantaneous sense of high elation—slightly premature as it turned out, for the candle, while burning, brought forth nothing at all.

It was only on Herr Klose's return, when at his approaching step the candle flickered out, that the thing happened. But of this Herr Payk was not aware, for he was already dead when the red-penciled notice on the fence announced:

RIGHT-HAND CANDLE EXTINGUISHED—
HERR PAYK DECEASED.

The persuasive realism of the following story gives a strong impression that it is indeed a recording of actual events . . . so much so that the story may at first seem out of place in a magazine devoted to stories of fantasy and science fiction. Regardless of categories, however, we trust you will agree that it is a truly distinguished work of fiction.

AMONG THE DANGS

by George P. Elliott

I GRADUATED FROM SANSOM University in 1937 with honors in history, having intended to study law, but I had no money and nowhere to get any; by good fortune the anthropology department, which had just been given a grant for research, decided that I could do a job for them. In idle curiosity I had taken a course in anthro, to see what I would have been like had history not catapulted my people a couple of centuries ago up into civilization, but I had not been inclined to enlarge on the sketchy knowledge I got from that course; even yet, when I think about it, I feel like a fraud teaching anthropology. What chiefly recommended me to the department, aside from a friend, were three attributes: I was a good mimic, a long-distance runner, and black.

The Dangs live in a forested valley in the eastern foothills of the Andes. The only white man to report on them (and, it was loosely gossiped, the only one to return from them alive), Sir Bewley Morehead in 1910, owed his escape to the consternation caused by Halley's Comet. Otherwise, he reported, they would certainly have sacrificed him as they were preparing to do; as it was, they killed the priest who was to have killed him, so he reported, and then burned the temple down. However, Dr. Sorish, our most distinguished Sansom man, in the early Thirties developed an interest in the Dangs which led to my research grant; he had introduced a tribe of Amazonian head-shrinkers to the idea of planting grain instead of just harvesting it, as a result of which they had fattened,

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taken to drinking brew by the tubful, and elevated Sorish to the rank of new god; the last time he had descended among them—it is Sansom policy to follow through on any primitives we "do"—he had found his worshipers holding a couple of young Dang men captive and preparing them for ceremonies which would end only with the processing of their heads; his godhood gave him sufficient power to defer these ceremonies while he made half-a-dozen transcriptions of the men's conversations, and learned their language well enough to arouse the curiosity of his colleagues. The Dangs were handy with blowpipes; no one knew what pleased them; Halley's Comet wasn't due till 1984. But among the recordings Sorish brought back was a legend strangely chanted by one of these young men, whose very head perhaps you can buy today from a natural science company for $150 to $200, and the same youth had given Sorish a sufficient demonstration of the Dang prophetic trance, previously described by Morehead, to whet his appetite.

I was black, true; but, as Sorish pointed out, I looked as though I had been rolled in granite dust and the Dangs as though they had been rolled in brick dust; my hair was short and kinky, theirs long and straight; my lips were thick, theirs thin. It's like dressing a Greek up in reindeer skins, I said, and telling him to go pass himself off as a Lapp in Lapland. Maybe, they countered, but wouldn't he be more likely to get by than a naked Swahili with bones in his nose? I was a long-distance runner, true; but as I pointed out with a good deal of feeling, I didn't know the principles of jungle escape and had no desire to learn them in, as they put it, the field. They would teach me to throw the javelin and wield a machete, they would teach me the elements of judo, and as for poisoned darts and sacrifices they would insure my life—that is, my return within three years—for $5000. I was a good mimic, true; I would be able to reproduce the Dang speech, and especially the trance of the Dang prophets, for the observation of science—"make a genuine contribution to learning." In the Sansom concept, the researcher's experience is an inextricable part of anthropological study, and a good mimic provides the object for others' study as well as for his own. For doing this job I would be given round-trip transportation, an M.S. if I wrote a thesis on the material I gathered, the temporary insurance on my life, and $100 a month for the year I was expected to be gone. After I'd got them to throw in a fellowship of some sort for the following year, I agreed. It would pay for filling the forty cavities in my brothers' and sisters' teeth.

Dr. Sorish and I had to wait at the nearest outstation for a thunderstorm; when it finally blew up, I took off all my clothes, put on a breechcloth and leather apron, put a box of equipment on my head, and trotted after him; his people were holed in from the thunder, and we were in their settlement before they saw us. They were taller than I, they no doubt found my white teeth as disagreeable as I found their stained, filed teeth; but when Sorish spoke to me in English (telling me to pretend indifference to them while they sniffed me over), and in the accents of American acquaintances rather than in the harsh tones of divinity, their eyes filled with awe of me. Their taboo against touching Sorish extended itself to me; when a baby ran up to me and I lifted him up to play with him, his mother crawled, beating her head on the ground till I freed him.

The next day was devoted chiefly to selecting the man to fulfill Sorish's formidable command to guide me to the edge of the Dang country. As for running—if those dogs could be got to the next Olympics, Ecuador would take every long-distance medal on the board. I knew I had reached the brow of my valley only because I discovered that my guide, whom I had been lagging behind by fifty feet, at a turn in the path had disappeared into the brush.

Exhaustion allayed my terror; as I lay in the meager shade recuperating, I remembered to execute the advice I had given myself before coming: to act always as though I were not afraid. What would a brave man do next? Pay no attention to his aching feet, reconnoiter, and cautiously proceed. I climbed a jutting of rock and peered about. It was a wide, scrubby valley; on the banks of the river running down the valley I thought I saw a dozen mounds too regular for stones. I touched the handle of the hunting knife sheathed at my side, and trotted down the trackless hill.

The village was deserted, but the huts, though miserable, were clean and in good repair. This meant, according to the movies I had seen, that hostile eyes were watching my every gesture. I had to keep moving in order to avoid trembling. The river was clear and not deep. The unmutilated corpse of a man floated by. I felt like going downstream, but my hypothesized courage drove me up.

In half a mile I came upon a toothless old woman squatting by the track. She did not stop munching when I appeared, nor did she scream, or even stand up. I greeted her in Dang according to the formula I had learned, whereupon she cackled and smiled and nodded as gleefully as though I had just passed a test. She reminded me of my grandmother, rolled in

brick dust, minus a corncob pipe between her gums. Presently I heard voices ahead of me. I saw five women carrying branches and walking very slowly. I lurked behind them until they came to a small village, and watched from a bush while they set to work. They stripped the leaves off, carefully did something to them with their fingers, and then dropped them in small-throated pots. Children scrabbled around, and once a couple of them ran up and suckled at one of the women. There remained about an hour till sunset. I prowled, undetected. The women stood, like fashion models, with pelvis abnormally rocked forward; they were wiry, without fat even on their breasts; not even their thighs and hips afforded clean sweeping lines. I saw no men.

Before I began to get into a stew about the right tack to take, I stepped into the clearing and uttered their word of salutation. If a strange man should walk in your wife's front door and say, "How do you do," in an accent she did not recognize, simultaneously poking his middle finger at her, her consternation would be something like that of those Dang women; for unthinkingly I had nodded my head when speaking and turned my palm out, as one does in the United States; to them this was a gesture of intimacy, signifying desire. They disappeared into huts, clutching children.

I went to the central clearing and sat with my back to a log, knowing they would scrutinize me. I wondered where the men were. I could think of no excuse for having my knife in my hand except to clean my toenails. So astonishing an act was unknown to the Dangs; the women and children gradually approached in silence, watching; I cleaned my fingernails. I said the word for food; no one reacted, but presently a little girl ran up to me holding a fruit in both hands. I took it, snibbed her nose between my fingers, and with a pat on the bottom sent her back to her mother Upon this there were hostile glances, audible intakes of breath, and a huddling about the baby, who did not understand any more than I did why she was being consoled. While I ate the fruit I determined to leave the next move up to them. I sheathed my knife and squatted on my hunkers waiting. To disguise my nervousness I fixed my eyes on the ground between my feet, and grasped my ankles from behind in such a way—right ankle with right hand, left with left—as to expose the inner sides of my forearms. Now this was, as I later learned, pretty close to the initial posture taken for the prophetic trance; also I had a blue flower tattooed on my inner right arm and a blue serpent on my left (from the summer I'd gone to sea), the like of which had never been seen in this place.

At sundown I heard the men approach; they were anything but stealthy about it; I had the greatest difficulty in suppressing the shivers. In simple fear of showing my fear, I did not look up when the men gathered around, I could understand just enough of what the women were telling the men to realize that they were afraid of me. Even though I was pelted with pebbles and twigs till I was angry, I still did not respond, because I could not think what to do. Then something clammy was plopped onto my back from above and I leaped high, howling. Their spears were poised before I landed. "Strangers!" I cried, my speech composed. "Far kinsmen! I come from the mountains!" I had intended to say *from the river lands,* but the excitement tangled my tongue. Their faces remained expressionless, but no spears drove at me, and then, to be doing something, I shoved the guts under the log with my feet.

And saved my life by doing so. That I seemed to have taken, though awkwardly, the prophetic squat; that I bore visible marvels on my arm; that I was fearless and innerly absorbed; that I came from the mountains (their enemies lived toward the river lands); that I wore their apron and spoke their language, albeit poorly: all these disposed them to wonder at this mysterious outlander. Even so, they might very well have captured me, marvelous though I was, possibly useful to them, dangerous to antagonize, had I not been unmaimed, which meant that I was supernaturally guarded. Finally, my scrutinizing the fish guts, daring to smile as I did so, could mean only that I was prophetic; my leap when they had been dropped onto my back was prodigious, "far higher than a man's head," and my howl had been vatic; and my deliberately kicking the guts aside, though an inscrutable act, demonstrated at least that I could touch the entrails of an eel and live.

So I was accepted to the Dangs. The trouble was that they had no ceremony for naturalizing me. For them, every act had a significance, and here they were faced with a reverse problem, for which nothing had prepared them. They could not possibly just assimilate me without marking the event with an act (that is, a ceremony) signifying my entrance. For them, nothing *just happened,* certainly nothing men did. Meanwhile, I was kept in a sort of quarantine while they deliberated. I did not, to be sure, understand why I was being isolated in a hut by myself, never spoken to except efficiently, watched but not restrainted. I swam, slept, scratched, watched, swatted, ate; I was not really alarmed, because they had not restrained me forcibly and they gave me food. I began making friends

with some of the small children, especially while swimming, and there were two girls of fifteen or so who found me terribly funny. I wished I had some magic, but I knew only card tricks. The sixth day, swimming, I thought I was being enticed around a point in the river by the two girls, but when I began to chase them they threw good-sized stones at me missing me only because they were such poor shots. A corpse floated by; when they saw it they immediately placed the sole of their right foot on the side of their left knee and stood thus on one leg till the corpse floated out of sight; I followed the girls' example, teetering. I gathered from what they said that some illness was devastating their people; I hoped it was one of the diseases I had been inoculated against. The girls' mothers found them talking with me and cuffed them away.

I did not see them for two days, but the night of my eighth day there, the bolder of them hissed me awake at the door of my hut in a way that meant "no danger." I recognized her when she giggled. I was not sure what their customs were in these matters, but while I was deliberating what my course of wisdom should be she crawled into the hut and lay on the mat beside me. She liked me; she was utterly devoid of reticence; I was twenty-one and far from home; even a scabby little knotty-legged fashion model is hard to resist under such circumstances. I learned, before falling asleep, that there was a three-way debate among the men over what to do with me: initiate me according to the prophet-initiation rites, invent a new ceremony, or sacrifice me as propitiation to the disease among them, as was usually done with captives. Each had its advantages and drawbacks; even the news that some of the Dangs wanted to sacrifice me did not excite me as it would have done a week before; now, I half-sympathized with their trouble. I was awakened at dawn by the outraged howl of a man at my door; he was the girl's father; the village men gathered and the girl cowered behind me. They talked for hours outside my hut, men arrived from other villages up and down the valley, and finally they agreed upon a solution to all the problems: they proposed that I should be made one of the tribe by marriage on the same night that I should be initiated into the rites of prophecy.

The new-rite men were satisfied by this arrangement because of the novelty of having a man married and initiated on the same day; but the sacrifice party was visibly unmollified. Noticing this and reflecting that the proposed arrangement would permit me to do all my trance-research under optimum conditions and to accumulate a great deal of sexual

data as well, I agreed to it. I would of course only be going through the forms of marriage, not meaning them; as for the girl, I took this vow to myself (meaning without ceremony): "So long as I am a Dang, I shall be formally a cortect husband to her." More's a pity.

Fortunately a youth from down the valley already had been chosen as a novice (at least a third of the Dang men enter the novitiate at one time or another, though few make the grade), so that I had not only a companion during the four-month preparation for the vatic rites but also a control upon whom I might check my experience of the stages of the novitiate. My mimetic powers stood me in good stead; I was presumed to have a special prophetic gift and my readiness at assuming the proper stances and properly performing the ritual acts confirmed the Dangs' impressions of my gift; but also, since I was required to proceed no faster than the ritual pace in my learning, I had plenty of leisure in which to observe in the smallest detail what I did and how I, and to some extent my fellow novice, felt. If I had not had this self-observing to relieve the tedium, I think I should have been unable to get through that mindless holding of the same position hour after hour, that mindless repeating of the same act day after day. The Dangs *appear* to be bored much of the time, and my early experience with them was certainly that of ennui, though never again ennui so acute as during this novitiate; yet I doubt that it would be accurate to say they actually are bored, and I am sure that the other novice was not, as a fisherman waiting hours for a strike cannot be said to be bored. The Dangs do not sate themselves on food; the experience which they consider most worth seeking, vision, is one which cannot glut either the prophet or his auditors; they cannot imagine an alternative to living as they live or, more instantly, to preparing a novice as I was being prepared. The people endure; the prophets, as I have learned, wait for the time to come again, and though they are bitten and stung by ten thousand fears, about this they have no anxiety—the time will surely come again. Boredom implies either satiety, and they were poor and not interested in enriching themselves, or the frustration of impulse, and they were without alternatives and diversions; and that intense boredom which is really a controlled anxiety they are protected from by never doubting the worth of their vision or their power to achieve it.

I was assisted through these difficult months, during which I was supposed to do nothing but train, by Redadu, my betrothed. As a novice, I was strictly to abstain from sexual intercourse; but as betrothed, we were supposed to

make sure before marriage that we satisfied one another, for adultery by either husband or wife was punishable by maiming. Naturally, the theologians were much exercised by this impasse of mine, but while they were arguing, Redadu and I took the obvious course—we met more or less surreptitiously. Since my vatic training could not take place between sunrise and sundown, I assumed that we could meet in the afternoon when I woke up, but when I began making plans to this effect, I discovered that she did not know what I was talking about. It makes as much sense in Dang to say, "Let's blow poisoned darts at the loss of the moon," as to say, "Let's make love in broad daylight." Redadu dissolved in giggles at the absurdity. What to do? She found us a cave. Everyone must have known what I was up to, but we were respectable (the Dang term for it was harsher, *deed-liar*), so we were never disturbed. Redadu's friends would not believe her stories of my luxurious love ways, especially my biting with lips instead of teeth. At one time or another she sent four of them to the cave for me to demonstrate my prowess upon; I was glad that none of them pleased me as much as she did, for I was beginning to be fond of her. My son has told me that lip-biting has become, if not a customary, at any rate a possible caress.

As the night of the double rite approached, a night of full moon, a new conflict became evident: the marriage must be consummated exactly at sundown, but the initiation must begin at moonrise, less than two hours later. For some reason that was not clear to me, preparing for the initiation would incapacitate me for the consummation. I refrained from pointing out that it was only technically that this marriage needed consummating and even from asking why I would not be able to do it. The solution, which displeased everyone, was to defer the rites for three nights, when the moon, though no longer perfectly round, would rise sufficiently late so that I would, by hurrying, be able to perform both of my functions. Redadu's father, who had been of the sacrifice party, waived ahead of time his claim against me: legally he was entitled to annul the marriage if I should leave the marriage hut during the bridal night. And although I in turn could legally annul it if she left the hut, I waived my claim as well so that she might attend my initiation.

The wedding consisted chiefly of our being bound back to back by the elbows and being sung to and danced about all day. At sunset, we were bound face to face by the elbows (most awkward) and sent into our hut. Outside, the two mothers waited—a high prophet's wife took the place of my mother

(my Methodist mother!)—until our orgiastic cries indicated that the marriage had been consummated, and then came in to sever our bonds and bring us the bridal foods of cold stewed eel and parched seeds. We fed each other bite for bite and gave the scraps to our mothers, who by the formula with which they thanked us pronounced themselves satisfied with us; and then a falsetto voice called to me to hurry to the altar. A man in the mask of a moon slave was standing outside my hut on his left leg with the right foot against his left knee, and he continued to shake his rattle so long as I was within earshot.

The men were masked. Their voices were all disguised. I wondered whether I was supposed to speak in an altered voice; I knew every stance and gesture I was to make, but nothing of what I was to say; yet surely a prophet must employ words. I had seen some of the masks before—being repaired, being carried from one place to another—but now, faced with them alive in the failing twilight, I was impressed by them in no scientific or aesthetic way: they terrified and exalted me. I wondered if I would be given a mask. I began trying to identify such men as I could by their scars and missing fingers and crooked arms, and noticed to my distress that they too were all standing one-legged in my presence. But I had thought that was the stance to be assumed in the presence of the dead! We were at the entrance to The Cleft, a dead-end ravine in one of the cliffs along the valley; my fellow novice and I were each given a gourdful of some vile-tasting drink and were then taken up to the end of The Cleft, instructed to assume the first position, and left alone. We squatted as I had been squatting by the log on my first day, except that my head was cocked in a certain way and my hands clasped my ankles from the front. The excitements of the day seemed to have addled my wits; I could concentrate on nothing, and lost my impulse to observe coolly what was going on; I kept humming *St. James Infirmary* to myself, and though at first I had been thinking the words, after a while I realized that I had nothing but the tune left in my head. At moonrise we were brought another gourd of the liquor to drink, and were then taken to the mouth of The Cleft again. I did, easily, whatever I was told. The last thing I remember seeing before taking the second position was the semicircle of masked men facing us and chanting, and behind them the women and children—all standing on the left leg. I lay on my back with my left ankle on my right and my hands crossed over my navel, rolled my eyeballs up and held the lids open without blinking, and breathed in the necessary rhythm,

each breath taking four heartbeats, with an interval of ten heartbeats between each exhalation and the next inspiration. Then the drug took over. At dawn when a called command awoke me, I found myself on an islet in the river dancing with my companion a leaping dance I had not known or even seen before, and brandishing over my head a magnificent red and blue, new-made mask of my own. The shores of the river were lined with the people chanting as we leaped, and all of them were either sitting or else standing on both feet. If we had been dead the night before, we were alive now. Redadu told me, after I had slept and returned to myself, that my vision was splendid, but of course she was no more permitted to tell me what I had said than I was able to remember it. The Dangs' sense of rhythm is as subtle as their ear for melody is monotonous, and for weeks I kept hearing rhythmic snatches of *St. James Infirmary* scratched on calabash drums and tapped on blocks.

Sorish honored me by rewriting my master's thesis and adding my name as co-author of the resultant essay, which he published in JAFA (*The Journal of American Field Anthropology*): "Techniques of Vatic Hallucinosis Among the Dangs." And the twenty-minute movie I made of a streamlined performance of the rites is still widely used as an audio-visual aid.

By 1939 when I had been cured of the skin disease I had brought back with me and had finished the work for my M.A., I still had no money. I had been working as the assistant curator of the university's Pre-Columbian Museum and had developed a powerful aversion to devoting my life to cataloguing, displaying, restoring, warehousing. But my chances of getting a research job, slight enough with a Ph.D., were nil with only an M.A. The girl I was going with said (I had not told her about Redadu) that if we married she would work as a nurse to support me while I went through law school; I was tempted by the opportunity to fulfill my original ambition, and probably I would have done it had she not pressed too hard; she wanted me to leave anthropology, she wanted me to become a lawyer, she wanted to support me, but what she did not want was to make my intentions, whatever those might be, her own. Therefore, when a new grant gave me the chance to return to the Dangs, I gladly seized it; not only would I be asserting myself against Velma, but also I would be paid for doing the research for my Ph.D. thesis; besides, I was curious to see the Congo-Maryland-Dang bastard I had left in Redadu's belly. My assignment was to make a general cultural survey but especially to discover the *content* of the vatic experience—not just the tech-

nique, not even the hallucinations and stories, but the qualities of the experience itself. The former would get me a routine degree, but the latter would, if I did it, make me a name and get me a job. After much consultation I decided against taking with me any form of magic, including medicine; the antibiotics had not been invented yet, and even if there had been a simple way to eradicate the fever endemic among the Dangs, my advisers persuaded me that it would be an error to introduce it since the Dangs were barely able to procure food for themselves as it was and since they might worship me for doing it, thereby making it impossible for me to do my research with the proper empathy. I arrived the second time provided only with my knife (which had not seemed to impress these stone-agers), salve to soothe my sores, and the knowledge of how to preserve fish against a lean season, innovation enough but not one likely to divinize me.

I was only slightly worried how I would be received on my return, because of the circumstances under which I had disappeared. I had become a fairly decent hunter —the women gathered grain and fruit—and I had learned to respect the Dangs' tracking abilities enough to have been nervous about getting away safely. While hunting with a companion in the hills south of our valley, I had run into a couple of hunters from an enemy tribe which seldom foraged so far north as this. They probably were as surprised as I and probably would have been glad to leave me unmolested; however, outnumbered and not knowing how many more were with them, I whooped for my companion; one of the hunters in turn, not knowing how many were with me, threw his spear at me. I sidestepped it and reached for my darts and, though I was not very accurate with a blowpipe, I hit him in the thigh: within a minute he was writhing on the ground, for in my haste I had blown a venomous dart at him, and my comrade took his comrade prisoner by surprise. As soon as the man I had hit was dead. I withdrew my dart and cut off his ear for trophy, and we returned with our captive. He told our war chief in sign language that the young man I had killed was the son and heir of their king and that my having mutilated him meant their tribe surely would seek to avenge his death. The next morning a Dang search party was sent out to recover the body so that it might be destroyed and trouble averted, but it had disappeared; war threatened. The day after that I chose to vanish; they would not think of looking for me in the direction of Sorish's tribe, north, but would assume that I had been captured by the southern tribe in retribution for their prince's death.

My concern now, two years later, was how to account for not having been maimed or executed; the least I could do was to cut a finger off, but when it came to the point, I could not even bring myself to have a surgeon do it, much less do it myself; I had adequate lies prepared for their other questions, but about this I was a bit nervous. I got there at sundown.

Spying, I did not see Redadu about the village. On the chance, I slipped into our hut when no one was looking; she was there, playing with our child. He was as cute a little preliterate as you ever saw suck a thumb, and it made me chuckle to think he would never be literate either. Redadu's screams when she saw me fetched the women, but when they heard a man's voice they could not intrude. In her joy she lacerated me with her fingernails (the furrows across my shoulder festered for a long time); I could do no less than bite her arm till she bled; the primal scene we treated our son to presumably scarred him for life, though I must say the scars haven't showed up yet. I can't deny I was glad to see her too; for, though I felt for her none of the tender, complex emotions I had been feeling for Velma, emotions which I more or less identified as being love, yet I was so secure with her sexually, I knew so well what to do and what to expect from her in every important matter, that it was an enormous, if cool, comfort to me to be with her. *Comfort* is a dangerous approximation to what I mean; being with her provided, as it were, the condition for doing; in Sansom I did not consider her my wife, and here I did not recognize in myself the American emotions of love or marriage; yet it seemed to me right to be with her, and our son was no bastard. *Cool:* I cannot guarantee that mine was the usual Dang emotion, for it is hard for the cool to gauge the warmth of others; in my reports I have denied any personal experience of love among the Dangs for this reason. When we emerged from the hut, there was amazement and relief among the women: amazement that I had returned and relief that it had not been one of their husbands pleasuring the widow. But the men were more ambiguously pleased to see me: Redadu's scratches were not enough and they doubted my story, that the enemy king had made me his personal slave who must be bodily perfect. They wanted to hear me prophesy.

Redadu told me afterward, hiding her face in my arms for fear of being judged insolent, that I surpassed myself that night, that only the three high prophets had ever been so inspired. And it was true that even the men most hostile to me did not oppose my reentry into the tribe after they had heard me prophesy: they could have swal-

lowed the story I fed them about my two-year absence only because they believed in me the prophet. Dangs make no separation between fact and fantasy, apparent reality and visionary reality, truth and beauty. I once saw a young would-be prophet shudder away from a stick on the ground, saying it was a snake, and none of the others, except the impressionable, was afraid of the stick: it was said of him that he was a beginner. Another time I saw a prophet scatter the whole congregation, myself included, when he screamed at the sight of a beast which he called a cougar: when sober dawn found the speared creature to be a cur it was said of the prophet that he was strong, and he was honored with an epithet, Cougar-Dog. My prophesying the first night of my return must have been of this caliber, though to my disappointment I was given no epithet, not even the nickname I'd sometimes heard before, Bush-Hair. I knew there was a third kind of prophesying, the highest, performed only on the most important occasions in the Cave-Temple where I had never been. No such occasion had presented itself during my stay before, and when I asked one of the other prophets about that ceremony, he put me off with the term Wind-Haired Child of the Sun; from another, I learned that the name of this sort of prophesying was Stone is Stone. Obviously, I was going to have to stay until I could make sense of these mysteries.

There was a war party that wanted my support; my slavery was presumed to have given me knowledge which would make a raid highly successful; because of this as well as because I had instigated the conflict by killing the king's son, I would be made chief of the raiding party. I was uneasy about the fever, which had got rather worse among them during the previous two years, without risking my neck against savages who were said always to eat a portion of their slain enemy's liver raw and whose habitat I knew nothing of. I persuaded the Dangs, therefore, that they should not consider attacking before the rains came, because their enemies were now the stronger, having on their side their protector, the sun. They listened to me, and waited. Fortunately, it was a long dry season, during which I had time to find a salt deposit and to teach a few women the rudiments of drying and salting fish; and during the first week of the rains, every night there were showers of falling stars to be seen in the sky; to defend against them absorbed all energies for weeks, including the warriors'. Even so, even though I was a prophet, a journeyman prophet as it were, I was never in on these rites in the Cave-Temple. I dared

not ask many questions. Sir Bewley Morehead had described a temple surrounded by seventy-five poles, each topped by a human head; he could hardly have failed to mention that it was in a cave; yet he made no such mention, and I knew of no temple like the one he had described. At a time of rains and peace in the sky, the war party would importune me. I did not know what to do but wait.

The rains became violent, swamping the villages in the lower valley and destroying a number of huts; yet the rainy season ended abruptly two months before its usual time. Preparations for war had already begun, and day by day as the sun's strength increased and the earth dried, the war party became more impatient; and the preparations in themselves lulled my objections to the raid, even to my leading the raid, and stimulated my desire to make war. But the whole project was canceled a couple of days before we were to attack because of the sudden fever of one of the high prophets; the day after he came down, five others of the tribe fell sick, among them Redadu. There was nothing I could do but sit by her, fannng her and sponging her till she died. Her next older sister took our son to rear. I would allow no one to prepare her body but myself, though her mother was supposed to help; I washed it with the proper infusions of herbs, and at dawn, in the presence of her clan, I laid her body on the river, thank heaven it floated, or I should have had to spend another night preparing it further. I felt like killing someone now; I recklessly called for war now, even though the high prophet had not yet died; I was restrained, not without admiration. I went up into the eastern hills by myself, and returned after a week bearing the hide of a cougar; I had left the head and claws on my trophy, in a way the Dangs had never seen; when I put the skin on in play by daylight and bounded and snarled, only the bravest did not run in terror. They called me Cougar-Man. And Redadu's younger sister came to sleep with me; I did not want her, but she so stubbornly refused to be expelled that I kept her for the night, for the next night, for the next; it was not improper. The high prophet did not die, but lay comatose most of the time. The Dangs have ten master prophets, of whom the specially gifted, whether one or all ten, usually two or three, are high prophets. Fifteen days after Redadu had died, well into the abnormal dry spell, nearly all the large fish seemed to disappear from the river. A sacrifice was necessary. It was only because the old man was so sick that a high prophet was used for this occasion; otherwise a captive or a woman would have served the purpose. A new

master prophet must replace him, to keep the complement up to ten. I was chosen.

The exultation I felt when I learned that the master prophets had co-opted me among them was by no means cool and anthropological, for now that I had got what I had come to get, I no longer wanted it for Sansom reasons. *If the conditions of my being elevated,* I said to myself, *are the suffering of the people, Redadu's death, and the sacrifice of an old man, then I must make myself worthy of the great price. Worthy:* a value word, not a scientific one. Of course, my emotions were not the simple pride and fear of a Dang. I can't say what sort they were, but they were fierce.

At sundown all the Dangs of all the clans were assembled about the entrance to The Cleft. All the prophets, masked, emerged from The Cleft and began the dance in a great wheel. Within this wheel, rotating against it, was the smaller wheel of the nine able-bodied master prophets. At the center, facing the point at which the full moon would rise, I hopped on one leg, then the other. I had been given none of the vatic liquor, that brew which the women, when I had first come among the Dangs, had been preparing in the small-throated pots; and I hoped I should be able to remain conscious throughout the rites. However, at moonrise a moon slave brought me a gourdful to drink without ceasing to dance. I managed to allow a good deal of it to spill unnoticed down with the sweat streaming off me, so that later I was able to remember what had happened, right up to the prophesying itself. The dance continued for at least two more hours; then the drums suddenly stopped and the prophets began to file up The Cleft, me last, dancing after the high prophets. We danced into an opening in the cliff from which a disguising stone had been rolled away; the people were not allowed to follow us. We entered a great cavern illuminated by ten smoking torches. We circled a palisade of stakes; the only sound was the shuffle of our feet and the snorts of our breathing.

There were seventy-five stakes, as Morehead had seen, but only on twenty-eight of them were heads impaled, the last few with flesh on them still, not yet skulls cleaned of all but hair. In the center was a huge stone under the middle of which a now dry stream had tunneled a narrow passage: on one side of the stone, above the passage, were two breast-like protuberances, one of which had a recognizable nipple suitably placed. Presently the dancing file reversed so that I was the leader. I had not been taught what to do; I wove the file through the round of stakes, and spiraled inward till we were three deep about The Stone; I

straddled the channel, raised my hands till they were touching the breasts and gave a great cry. I was, for reasons I do not understand, shuddering all over; though I was conscious and though I had not been instructed, I was not worried that I might do the wrong thing next; when I touched The Stone, a dread shook me without affecting my exaltation. Two moon slaves seized my arms, took off my mask, and wrapped and bound me, arms at my side and legs pressed together, in a deer hide, and then laid me on my back in the channel under The Stone with my head only half out, so that I was staring up the sheer side of rock. The dancers continued, though the master prophets had disappeared. My excitement; the new, unused position; being mummied tightly; the weakness of the drug; my will to observe; all kept me conscious for a long time. Gradually, however, my eyes began to roll up into my head, I strained less powerfully against the things that bound me, and I felt my breathing approach the vatic rhythm. At this point, I seemed to break out in a new sweat, on my forehead, my throat, in my hair; I could hear a splash; groggily I licked my chin; an odd taste; I wondered if I was bleeding. Of course—it was the blood of the sick old high prophet, who had just been sacrificed on The Stone above me; well, his blood would give me strength; wondering remotely whether his fever could be transmitted by drinking his blood, I entered the trance. At dawn I emerged into consciousness while I was still prophesying; I was on a ledge in the valley above all the people, in my mask again. I listened to myself finish the story I was telling. "He was afraid. A third time a man said to him: 'You are a friend of the most high prophet.' He answered: 'Not me. I do not know that man they are sacrificing.' Then he went into a dark corner; he put his hands over his face all day." When I came to the Resurrection, a sigh blew across the people.

It was the best story they had ever heard. Of course. But I was not really a Christian. For several weeks I fretted over my confusion, this new, unsuspected confusion. I was miserable without Redadu; I let her sister substitute only until I had been elevated, and then I cast her off, promising her however that she and only she might wear an anklet made of my teeth when I should die. Now that I was a master prophet I could not be a warrior; I had had enough hunting, fishing, tedious ceremonies. Hunger from the shortage of fish drove the hunters high into the foothills; there was not enough; they ate my preserved fish, suspiciously, but they ate them. When I left, it was not famine that I was escaping, but my confusion; I was fleeing to the classrooms and the

cool museums where I should be neither a leftover Christian nor a mimic of a Dang.

My academic peace lasted for just two years, during which time I wrote five articles on my researches, publishing them this time under my name only, did some of the work for my doctorate, and married Velma. Then came World War II, in which my right hand was severed above the wrist; I was provided with an artificial hand and given enough money so that I could afford to finish my degree in style. We had two daughters and I was given a job at Sansom. There was no longer a question of my returning to the Dangs. I would become a settled anthropologist: teach, and quarrel with my colleagues in the learned journals. But by the time the Korean War came along and robbed us of a lot of our students, my situation at the university had changed considerably. Few of my theoretical and disputatious articles were printed in the journals, and I hated writing them; I was not given tenure and there were some hints to the effect that I was considered a one-shot man, a flash-in-the-pan; Velma nagged for more money and higher rank. My only recourse was further research, and when I thought of starting all over again with some other tribe—in Northern Australia, along the Zambesi, on an African Island—my heart sank. The gossip was not far from the mark—I was not one hundred per cent the scientist and never would be. I had just enough reputation and influential recommendations to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship; supplemented by a travel grant from the university, this made it possible for me to leave my family comfortably provided for and to return to the Dangs.

A former student now in Standard Oil in Venezuela arranged to have me parachuted among them from an S.O. plane; there was the real danger that they would kill me before they recognized me, but if I arrived in a less spectacular fashion I was pretty sure they would sacrifice me for their safety's sake. This time, being middle-aged, I left my hunting knife and brought instead at my belt a pouch filled with penicillin and salves. I had a hard time identifying the valley from the air; it took me so long that it was sunset before I jumped; I knew how the Dangs were enraged by airplanes, especially by the winking lights of night fliers, and I knew they would come for me if they saw me billowing down. Fortunately, I landed in the river, for, though I was nearly drowned before I disentangled my parachute harness, I was also out of range of the blowpipes. I finally identified myself to the warriors brandishing their spears along the shore; they had not quite dared to swim out after

so prodigious a being; even after they knew who I said I was and allowed me to swim to shore, they saw me less as myself as a supernatural being. I was recognized by newcomers who had not seen me so closely swinging from the parachute (the cloud); on the spot my epithet became, as it remained, Sky-Cougar. Even so, no one dared touch me till the high prophet—there was only one now—had arrived and talked with me: my artificial hand seemed to him an extension of the snake tattooed onto my skin; he would not touch it; I suddenly struck him with it and pinched his arm. "Pinchers," I said, using the word for a crayfish claw, and he laughed. He said there was no way of telling whether I was what I seemed to be until he had heard me phophesy; if I prophesied as I had done before I had disappeared, I must be what I seemed to be; meanwhile, for the three weeks till full moon, I was to be kept in the hut for captives.

At first I was furious at being imprisoned, and when mothers brought children from miles about to peek through the stakes at the man with the snake-hand, I snarled or sulked like a caged wolf. But I became conscious that a youth, squatting in a quiet place had been watching me for hours, and demanded of him who he was. He said, "I am your son," but he did not treat me as his father. To be sure, he could not have remembered what I looked like; my very identity was doubted; even if I were myself, I was legendary, a stranger who had become a Dang and had been held by an enemy as captive slave for two years and had then become a master prophet with the most wonderful vision anyone knew. Yet he came to me every day and answered all the questions I put to him. It was, I believe, my artificial hand that finally kept him aloof from me; no amount of acquaintance could accustom him to that. By the end of the first week it was clear to me that if I wanted to survive—not to be accepted as I once had been, just to survive—I would have to prophesy the Passion again. And how could I determine what I would say when under the vatic drug? I imagined a dozen schemes for substituting colored water for the drug, but I would need an accomplice for that and I knew that not even my own son would serve me in so forbidden an act.

I called for the high prophet. I announced to him in tones all the more arrogant because of my trepidations that I would prophesy without the vatic liquor. His response to my announcement astonished me: he fell upon his knees, bowed his head, and rubbed dust into his hair. He was the most powerful man among the Dangs, except in time of war when the

war chief took over, and furthermore he was an old man of personal dignity; yet here he was abasing himself before me and, worse, rubbing dust into his hair as was proper in the presence of the very sick to help them in their dying. He told me why: prophesying successfully from a voluntary trance was the test which I must pass to become a high prophet; normally a master prophet was forced to this, for the penalty for failing it was death. I dismissed him with a wave of my claw.

I had five days to wait until full moon. The thought of the risk I was running was more than I could handle consciously; to avoid the jitters I performed over and over all the techniques of preparing for the trance, though I carefully avoided entering it. I was not sure I was able to enter it alone, but whether I could or not I knew I wanted to conserve my forces for the great test. At first during those five days I would remind myself once in a while of my scientific purpose in going into the trance consciously; at other times I would assure myself that it was for the good of the Dangs I was doing it, since it was not wise or safe for them to have only one high prophet. Both of these reasons were true enough, but not very important. As scientist, I should tell them some new myth, say the story of Abraham and Isaac or of Oedipus, so that I could compare its effect on them with that of the Passion; as master prophet, I should ennoble my people if I could. However, thinking these matters over as I held my vatic squat hour after hour, visited and poked at by prying eyes, I could find no myth to satisfy me: either, as in the case of Abraham, it involved a concept of God which the Dangs could not reach, or else, as with Oedipus, it necessitated more drastic changes than I trusted myself to keep straight while prophesying—that Oedipus should mutilate himself was unthinkable to the Dangs and that the gods should be represented as able to forgive him for it was impious. Furthermore, I did not think, basically, that any story I could tell them would in fact ennoble them. I was out to save my own skin.

The story of Christ I knew by heart; it had worked for me once, perhaps more than once; it would work again. I rehearsed it over and over, from the Immaculate Conception to the Ascension. But such was the force of that story on me that by the fifth day my cynicism had disappeared along with my scientism, and I believed, not that the myth itself was true, but that relating it to my people was the best thing it was possible for me to do for them. I remember telling myself that this story would help raise them toward monotheism, a necessary stage in the evolution toward freedom. I felt a certain

satisfaction in the thought that some of the skulls on the stakes in the Cave-Temple were very likely those of missionaries who had failed to convert these heathen.

At sundown of the fifth day, I was taken by moon slaves to a cave near The Cleft, where I was left in peace. I fell into a troubled sleep, from which I awoke in a sweat: "Where am I? What am I about to do?" It seemed to me dreadfully wrong that I should be telling these, my people, a myth in whose power, but not in whose truth, I believed. Why should I want to free them from superstition up into monotheism and then up into my total freedom, when I myself was half-returning, voluntarily, down the layers again? The energy for these sweating questions came, no doubt, from my anxiety about how I was going to perform that night, but I did not recognize this fact at the time. Then I thought it was my conscience speaking, and that I had no right to open to the Dangs a freedom I myself was rejecting. It was too late to alter my course; honesty required me, and I resolved courageously, not to prophesy at all.

When I was fetched out, the people were in assembly at The Cleft and the wheel of master prophets was revolving against the greater wheel of dancers. I was given my cougar skin. Hung from a stake, in the center where I was to hop, was a huge, terrific mask I had never seen before. As the moon rose, her slaves hung this mask on me; the thong cut into the back of my neck cruelly, and at the bottom the mask came to a point that pressed my belly; it was so wide my arms could only move laterally. It had no eyeholes; I broke into a sweat wondering how I should be able to follow the prophets into the Cave-Temple. It turned out to be no problem: the two moon slaves, one on each side, guided me by prodding spears in my ribs. Once in the cave, they guided me to the back side of The Stone and drove me to climb it, my feet groping for steps I could not see; once, when I lost my balance, the spears' pressure kept me from falling backward. By the time I reached the top of The Stone, I was bleeding and dizzy. With one arm I kept the mask from gouging my belly while with the other I helped my aching neck support the mask. I did not know what to do next. Tears of pain and anger poured from my eyes. I began hopping. I should have been moving my arms in counterpoint to the rhythm of my hop, but I could not bear the thought of letting the mask cut into me more. I kept hopping in the same place, for fear of falling off; I had not been noticing the sounds of the other prophets, but suddenly I was aware that they were making no

sounds at all. In my alarm I lurched to the side, and cut my foot on a sharp break in the rock. Pain converted my panic to rage.

I lifted the mask and held it flat above my head. I threw my head back and howled as I had never howled in my life, through a constricted, gradually opening throat, until at the end I was roaring; when I gasped in my breath, I made a barking noise. I leaped and leaped, relieved of pain, confident. I punched my knee desecratingly through the brittle hide of the mask, and threw it behind me off The Stone. I tore off my cougar skin and, holding it with my claw by the tip of its tail, I whirled it around my head. The prophets, massed below me, fell onto their knees. I felt their fear. Howling, I soared the skin out over them; one of those on whom it landed screamed hideously. A commotion started; I could not see very well what was happening. I barked and they turned toward me again. I leaped three times and then, howling, jumped wide-armed off The Stone. The twelve-foot drop hurt severely my already cut foot. I rolled exhausted into the channel in the cave floor.

Moon slaves with trembling hands mummied me in the deerskin and shoved me under The Stone with only my head sticking out. They brought two spears with darts tied to the points; rolling my head to watch them do this, I saw that the prophets were kneeling over and rubbing dirt into their hair; then the slaves laid the spears alongside the base of The Stone with the poisoned pricks pointed at my temples; exactly how close they were I could not be sure, but close enough so that I dared not move my head. In all my preparations I had, as I had been trained to do, rocked and wove at least my head; now, rigidity, live rigidity. A movement would scratch me and a scratch would kill me.

I pressed my hook into my thigh, curled my toes, and pressed my tongue against my teeth till my throat ached. I did not dare relieve myself even with a howl, for I might toss my head fatally. I strained against my thongs to the verge of apoplexy. For a while, I was unable to see, for sheer rage. Fatigue collapsed me. Yet I dared not relax my vigilance over my movements. My consciousness sealed me off. Those stone protuberances up between which I had to stare in the flickering light were merely chance processes on a boulder, similes to breasts. The one thing I might not become unconscious of was the pair of darts waiting for me to err. For a long time I thought of piercing my head against them, for relief, for spite. Hours passed. I was carefully watched.

I do not know what wild

scheme I had had in mind when I had earlier resolved not to prophesy, what confrontation or escape; it had had the pure magnificence of a fantasy-resolution. But the reality, which I had not seriously tried to evade, was that I must prophesy or die. I kept lapsing from English into a delirium of Dang. By the greatest effort of will, I looked about me rationally: I wondered whether the return of Halley's Comet, at which time all the stakes should be mounted by skulls, would make the Dangs destroy the Cave-Temple and erect a new one; I observed the straight, indented seam of sandstone running slantwise up the boulder over me and wondered how many eons this rotting piece of granite had been tumbled about by water; I reflected that I was unworthy both as a Christian and as a Dang to prophesy the life of Jesus, but I convinced myself that it was a trivial matter since to the Christians it was the telling more than the teller that counted and to the Dangs this myth would serve as a civilizing force they needed. Surely, I thought, my hypocrisy could be forgiven me, especially since I resolved to punish myself for it by leaving the Dangs forever as soon as I could. Having reached this rational solution, I smiled and gestured to the high prophet with my eyes; he did not move a muscle. When I realized that nothing to do with hypocrisy would unbind me, desperation swarmed in my guts and mounted toward my brain; with this question it took me over: *How can I make myself believe it is true?* I needed to catch hold of myself again. I dug my hook so hard into my leg—it was the only action I was able to take—that I gasped with pain; the pain I wanted. I did not speculate on the consequences of gouging my leg, tearing a furrow in my thigh muscle, hurting by the same act the stump of my arm to which the hook was attached; just as I knew that the prophets, the torches, the poisoned darts were there in the cave, so also I knew that far far back in my mind I had good enough reasons to be hurting myself, reasons which I could find out if I wanted to, but which it was not worth my trouble to discover; I even allowed the knowledge that I myself was causing the pain to drift back in my mind. The pain itself, only the pain, became my consciousness, purging all else. Then, as the pain subsided, leaving me free and equipoised, awareness of the stone arched over me flooded my mind. Because it had been invested by the people with a great mystery, it was an incarnation; the power of their faith made it the moon, who was female; at the same time it was only a boulder. I understood Stone is Stone, and that became my consciousness.

My muscles ceased straining against the bonds, nor did they slump; they ceased aching, they were at ease, they were ready. I said nothing, I did not change the upward direction of my glance, I did not smile; yet at this moment the high prophet removed the spears and had the moon slaves unbind me. I did not feel stiff nor did my wounds bother me, and when I put on my cougar skin and leaped, pulled the head over my face and roared, all the prophets fell onto their faces before me. I began chanting and I knew I was doing it all the better for knowing what I was about; I led them back out to the waiting people, and until dawn I chanted the story of the birth, prophesying, betrayal, sacrifice, and victory of the most high prophet. I am a good mimic, I was thoroughly trained, the story is the best; what I gave them was, for them, as good as a vision. I did not know the difference myself.

But the next evening I knew the difference. While I performed my ablutions and the routine ceremonies to the full moon, I thought with increasing horror of my state of mind during my conscious trance. What my state of mind actually had been I cannot with confidence now represent, for what I know of it is colored by my reaction against it the next day. I had remained conscious, in that I could recall what happened; yet that observer and commentator in myself, of whose existence I had scarcely been aware, but whom I had always taken for my consciousness, had vanished; I no longer had been thinking, but had lost control so that my consciousness had become what I was doing; and, almost worse, when I had been telling the story of Christ, I had done it not because I had wanted to or believed in it, but because, in some obscure sense, I had had to. Thinking about it afterward, I did not understand or want to understand what I was drifting toward, but I knew it was something that I feared. And I got out of there as soon as I was physically able.

Here in Sansom, what I have learned has provided me with material for an honorable contribution to knowledge, has given me a tenure to a professorship, thereby pleasing my wife; whereas if I had stayed there among the Dangs much longer, I would have reverted until I had become one of them, might not have minded when the time came to die under the sacrificial knife, would have taken in all ways the risk of prophecy, as my Dang son intends to do, until I had lost myself utterly.

Rosel George Brown's last story here, "Lost in Translation," had whimsically to do with a trip back to ancient Greece; the present example of the lady's rounded talents concerns the day-to-unusual-day problems of a young mother of the future—familiar problems, but with a difference.

A LITTLE HUMAN CONTACT

by Rosel George Brown

NOW JUST WHY IS IT THAT MEN are so different from women? And how did it happen that I was faced not only with Bob, who became more inexplicable each day, but also with his offspring, who was even less explicable. Indeed, I could see how women used to feel like Vessels, for I could find no vestige of *my* heredity in son Robert.

I floated disconsolately in the foamy Floatwater, trying to feel as luxuriant as the ladies in the advertisements. I calculated I should have at least eight extra minutes in which to relax and think. The thing to do was relax first . . . provided Robert didn't once more start stuffing the good china down the garbage grinder. What a noise that had made! And my mother-in-law had said, What happened to the Large Vegetable Bowl I gave you and Bob for your anniversary? And then, I don't understand how Robert got so . . .

Well, I don't understand it either, I thought fitfully, forgetting to relax. Male creatures are, I decided suddenly, an entirely alien species, as I read somewhere once. After all, they don't have that extra y-chromosome, or whatever the civilizing factor is. They all suffer from y-chromosome-envy, which is what makes them act so odd—

Though, looking at the problem rationally, Bob *had* seemed totally human when we got married. I sighed, feeling the comforting, enveloping pressure of the Floatwater around my body, and when I closed my eyes, I could remember a succession of long, low-slung evenings that began with martinis and progressed into all sorts of interesting discussions about nothing and—well, the end of each evening seemed to sort of merge into the beginning of the next evening.

And then Robert had come

along, and as an infant he had been so *good*. All cute and gurgly and tactful about going to sleep at just the right moment. We had no warning at all. I mean we just sort of assumed he'd stay that way. And every time I poked Robert into the diaper changer I thought how nice it was that he had been a boy and that if he'd been a girl I might even have been jealous of him.

I went underwater and held my breath until I counted a hundred. When I came up the walls blushed faintly and a little fairy sang out, "Surprise! Surprise."

"Answer the door, Robert," I shouted. I could see him through the one-way walls of his room, trying to set fire to the cat with a book of coldflame matches.

"Robert! You're almost four years old!"

The door bell sent another blush through the house.

Robert calmly finished striking the entire book of matches.

"What?" he answered finally.

"Answer the door. Mama doesn't have any clothes on. If it's someone we know, tell them to come in and wait." I slid the bathroom wall back so I could hear who it was.

"My mother," Robert announced grandly, "say to tell you she don't have no clo'se on. Come on in."

"Well, that's *mighty* nice of you, sonny." It was an unshaven male voice. Totally unfamiliar.

I dashed into the Family Room, meshing the openings of my bathrobe as I went.

"How 'bout a drink," Robert was saying. "Gin? Coolfizz?"

"Coolfizz," the unshaven voice grated companionably.

I grabbed up Robert, my heart thumping. There've been all these tramps around lately since they tore down the last of the slums. I pinched my son vigorously and he howled bloody murder.

"My child," I said shakily, "isn't well. If you could come back some other time, perhaps . . ."

"I could," he said noncommittally. He picked up a lighting tablet from the servo tray, stuffed it into his cigar and puffed life into the tobacco.

He was a small, thin man, sort of dust-colored, with an air of want about him. Not hunger. Something else.

"She *pinched* me," Robert screeched, finally articulate through his sobs. He pushed off from me with both feet, landing on the strange man's lap and leaving me sprawled on the floor.

"Pore little thing," the man said, patting Robert with a hand that should have been dirty but wasn't. "No wonder he's not well."

"Frankly," I said, "I was trying tactfully to get you to leave. After all, how do you think I feel, having a total stranger walk in on me and my defenseless little boy?"

"*Not* a little boy," Robert growled, showing his teeth.

"Robert," I warned in my most vicious tone, "if you bite me in front of this strange man I'll . . ." I couldn't think of anything bad enough, but Robert got the idea. He somersaulted over to our third set of indestructible drapes and began to climb.

"See?" I told the man. "He gets over-excited when strangers are around. Now *please* go."

"*He's* not over-excited," the man pointed out. "You are. And I'm not a perfect stranger. I'm the baby sitter and Family Friend."

"Down, Robert, down!" I cried, wringing my hands.

"I'm an old *bum*," the man said proudly, "from the very last slum. And due to modern technology and social efficiency, old bums have been rebuilt and sent out to make the world a better place to live in."

"So this is how you do it!" I began. There was a sound like a fingernail being scraped along a blackboard. I winced and even tried not to look. It was Robert, descending with the lower portion of the drape on the north exposure.

"Now that *does* it," I told the old man furiously. "I told you strangers excite him."

"Ole curtain's no good," Robert said sullenly, draping the material around his temples like Spacerman.

"Why don't you spank him? It wouldn't help him any, but you'd feel a lot better."

"His playgroup leader won't *let* me spank him." I was beginning to shake and the palms of my hands were getting itchy. "If you go away he'll calm down. Family Friend! If there's anything I *hate*, it's helpful people with cheerful little pamphlets who come around at just the wrong time. Now go away, whatever-your-name is."

"My name's Smitty and I live across the street on the third level and I've been observing you a long time and I came to help and I didn't know I wasn't . . ." The man broke off and to my horror he began to cry. I've never seen a man cry before and it made me feel like melting all over the floor. And also—well, I've always thought men were leathery all the way through. I didn't know they were in layers, like women. In my experience, they either howl, like Robert, or storm up and down the house cursing, like Bob. And they only have two moods, good and bad, like faucets. Only this . . . well, obviously this man had been putting on a gallant front and I had broken it and even I could see that's about the dirtiest thing you could do to a person.

"Get him a glass of gin, Robert," I said. "That white stuff in the bottle."

"He said he wanted Coolfizz."

"He needs gin."

"Don't bother, ma'm. I'll just go."

I pushed him back down, because words are all very well, but there isn't any word that beats a little human contact.

"I don't know why," he said, "I thought just getting cleaned up a little was going to make me respectable. I ain't . . . I'm not ever going to be like other people, Miss Angie. I already faced that. But I thought like this. Me and the other Voluntary Readjustments. I can't get no regular job. Any regular job. Even if it wasn't for my background, I'm too old. I got no training, except handicrafts once when I was in the pen and that ain't . . . anyway, I asked myself, what kind of job is there in the world that there ain't no machine to do it and other people don't want to do it and I might be able to do it?"

"I know a job exactly like that," I said grimly, "only you aren't equipped to do it. In fact, it looks as if I can't even do it."

"I was thinking along those lines," he said, relighting his cigar and beginning to look more cheerful. "Like this. They got labor-saving devices for everything else. But they don't have them for being a wife and mama. You got counselors and you got playgroups and so forth, but there ain't nobody but the mama for at least twenty hours of the day."

"I know," I said with a sigh. "But Smitty, much as I appreciate your offer to be the baby sitter and Family Friend, I don't quite see what you could do. I mean it isn't just a matter of wanting to get away from Robert now and then. It's a matter of doing something about his development. Why does Robert want to climb up the drapes? Why do I have to close my eyes and cross my fingers every time I walk into a room when he's been there first? And he's exactly like Bob! Just when he's done something absolutely atrocious, he looks at me with those great, big, innocent eyes and his look is *accusing*. You'd think I'd been hammering bamboo splinters under his fingernails instead of racking my brains day and night trying to think of ways to please him."

"Now, Miss Angie, your husband don't really commit atrocities, does he? He looks like such a nice, refined young gentleman."

"Well, I suppose going to sit in the Omnivision Room by himself every evening isn't really an atrocity. Only if you think of it as killing a perfectly beautiful evening seven nights a week, maybe it *is* an atrocity."

"You could go sit in there with him."

"I don't like to watch sports. All those silly little men running around some kind of field or other! I don't really see how grown men can . . ."

"Here de gin," Robert said cheerfully, turning it upside down in the gyrocup.

"*Don't* do that." It unnerves even me.

"You take it," Smitty said generously.

"No, no. It's for you. I can't drink this early."

Smitty took the gin and stared at it. "I . . . I took the cure," he said slowly.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said. "It's just that you looked like a man who needed a drink."

"I *tole* you he wanted Coolfizz," Robert said scornfully. And just to show how scornful he was he started up the other drape. I decided, What the hell. I'd have to get a whole new set anyway.

But Smitty was still holding the gin, looking at it and turning it slowly in his hand. "I've took the cure before," he said. "But this time . . . the smell of liquor reminds me of a lot of things. Do you know what I've come out of, Miss Angie?"

"I've got some idea," I said. How do you tell a person you understand? Particularly if you obviously don't. Not really.

"I came out of the last slum. Were you ever in a slum?"

"Yes, I was. My last year of college. I went down to see it and write a term paper. I called it, "The Vanishing American." I had on a white plastipaper dress and a pink camellia in my hair. I felt like I was going to the zoo. People aren't nice, Smitty," I said, by way of apology.

Smitty was still holding the gin and smelling it. "I wasn't no prize myself. Go on."

"I can remember walking along a shaky balcony sort of affair and I was sure it was going to tear out from under my feet any minute. I passed several screen doors with old newspapers tacked over them and found the second from the end. I was supposed to see the man there and offer to take him to the clinic for a treatment. That was the excuse.

"I knocked. I went in. There was only darkness until my eyes adjusted. Everywhere was the smell of stale urine, coal oil and cooking red beans, though nothing cooked in the room. Someone coughed. The man I had come to see was thin and suspicious-looking and he had tuberculosis. There was old, old dirt in the seams of the walls and the bedclothes and the very air. Not only his dirt. A chilly sort of anonymous dirt from so many people that had stayed there without living there.

" 'I've come to take you to the clinic,' I told the man.

" 'Go to hell,' he said. He didn't even look at me."

"That might have been me," Smitty said. "What did you do?"

"I left. It only had to be a short term paper. But Smitty, I wasn't

as beastly as I sound. I thought about that man and thought about him. And that room full of other people's dirt he lived in. Some dirt is nice and clean, you know. Like Robert's dirt. But I kept trying to imagine what it must be like, always to be dulled with drugs or drink and never to see the world and never to know what it is to be a man. Oh, Smitty, I'm *sorry*. I didn't mean . . ."

"No, I'm glad you know. Because, you see, I've been through Voluntary Readjustment. Physical and mental. The physical was nothing. I don't even know what diseases I had. But the mental . . ."

Smitty drank down the gin, all at once. Then his eyes blanked out and he shuddered. "It's worse," he said dully, "to have it and not to want it than it was to want it and not to have it." If he'd had his habits removed, what was left? All the paper scenery blew away and there was no beauty anywhere.

"I had to get born at an advanced age," Smitty said finally, "and I had to get born grown up. Take it from me, Miss Angie, when those babies cry, they got a reason.

"But you see, now I got an inside track on the human mind because I just had mine opened up and hosed out in front of my eyes. And I got something else, special, for Robert."

"For Robert?"

"Miss Angie, I don't want to shock you. But what a little boy is *really* like is—well, when I wanted a meal or liquor or a fix or if I just wanted to kick over garbage cans, that was all I thought about. I wanted it with everything in me and I wanted it right away and I didn't care who got hurt or what got broken or sometimes even if I got caught. So you see, I got this old me I carry around in my mind and it don't even twitch no more, but I got to look at it all the time and you know what it looks an awful lot like?"

"What?" I asked, cringing a little at the sound of the other curtain tearing.

"It looks like a very small boy."

"All right," I said, "I buy that. Now, how do you open up his mind and hose it out?"

"You miss the point, Miss Angie. I mean, I understand how he feels. And if you'll pardon my saying so, you don't."

"Well, I . . ." A thought descended on me abruptly. "My God! Cousin Alice! I was getting ready to take Robert to a birthday party."

"Hell with Cousin Alice," Robert said. He's astonishingly like his father.

"Tut-tut," Smitty murmured reprovingly. "That ain't nice. Say, 'Cousin Alice can go soak her head.'"

"Dat right?" Robert asked with the worshipful glance he usually reserves for the repair men.

"That ain't nice, either," I pointed out.

"A boy has to say *something*," Smitty said. "That's what I've been trying to tell you."

"Yeah!" Robert agreed roundly.

After the inferno invariably produced by a successful children's party, the house was a positive paradise of peace, even with Robert in it.

I walked into the kitchen to tape in something for dinner, and Robert came dashing in screaming, which is his normal tone of voice.

"Hush, dear," I said, trying to concentrate on halving a souffle recipe. "How do you divide three eggs in half?" There's no way to punch half an egg. I settled on two eggs instead.

"Where my knife!" Robert screamed.

"Shut up, honey. Let's see. That would be two and a half tablespoons of flour. But I can't punch half a . . .

"*Mama!*"

"Oh, all right. Knife? Knife?" I muttered, feeling about my person. It was stuck in my belt.

"Dey's a wolf in my room," Robert explained, dashing off with the rubber knife poised for a plunge.

"Five, six," I punched for the flour. Robert thinks the neighborhood is entirely infested with wolves. "Six. Seven." What sort of complex is that? Lupuslazuli? Did that sound right? "Eight."

There was a horrendous crash from Robert's roōm. "Oh, Lord," I thought, "I forgot and left the cat in there. I'll bet he's popping the bed out at her."

"Wolf!" Robert was screaming.

I walked into his room.

There was a huge, slavering wolf in the middle of the floor. Robert was circling him, rubber knife in hand. The wolf turned toward me, crouching to spring.

"Run, Robert!" I screamed.

"What's the matter?" I heard Smitty cry. He'd heard me and come rushing in the front door.

That was the last thing I heard. The last thing I saw was Robert jumping on that ravening beast's back and stabbing him with the rubber knife.

I came to with Smitty waving a bottle of sudsy ammonia under my nose.

"Don't worry, Mama," Robert cooed. "Robert killded the wolf."

Robert and Smitty split their sides laughing. I could have strangled them both with my bare hands.

"And just how did you pull this little coup?" I asked.

"Eggdyglasma," Robert said darkly. "Smitty gave it to me."

"And what is this eggdyglasma and how did Robert do it?"

"Ectoplasm," Smitty said with learned correctness. "I got it during my Readjustment. It's used for the . . . um . . . Projective Technique. I tell you, Miss Angie, that ectoplasm's had *some* exercise."

"Where is it now?" I was afraid to look around the room.

"I don't know," Smitty said. "I give it to Robert. It's his."

"Oh, no it isn't," I said. "I'm not going to have that thing around the house."

"A boy needs to exercise his imagination," Smitty said. "And you won't make no more wolves, will you Robert?"

"I won't make no more wolves," Robert agreed.

"Any more," Smitty corrected. "See what a good boy you got here? You just leave his education to me for a while and concentrate on your husband."

"Smitty," I said, "I think you make a fine baby sitter and Family Friend. But I *already* concentrate on my husband. It's not my fault. He just doesn't listen. I might as well be talking to the house motors."

"*He* doesn't listen?" Smitty asked cryptically.

"There is a horse," my husband said, "in the bathtub."

"I know, I know," I muttered nervously. I had just taken the souffle out. There was something wrong with it. One thing I noticed immediately. I had forgotten to add the cheese. "Do you like souffle manque?" I asked sort of hopelessly.

"There is a . . ."

"Oh, all *right*. You don't have to shout. Go get Robert's rubber knife and stab him."

"Angie," Robert said, in that tone as though we speak foreign languages to each other, "when I come home from work I'm tired. Why can't you at least arrange things so I can—"

"You are not tired," I said. "You didn't *used* to be tired." I burst into tears.

"Oh for heaven's *sake*," Bob snarled. "I'll go talk to Robert. What's he doing? Pouring ink all over my white shirts?"

Broodily, I dialed a cold luncheon meat sandwich.

Bob reappeared in the kitchen almost immediately with an odd look on his face. "There's an old tramp in Robert's room," he whispered as though he wanted to keep things quiet until he called the police.

"It's all right," I said, knowing I'd never really get the idea across. "He's not an old tramp. His name's Smitty and he's an ex-con."

"An *ex-con!* That makes it all right?"

"You needn't raise your voice. He's reformed now and he's of good character. He's a Voluntary Readjustment."

"How do you know he's of good character?"

"I just know."

"Angie," Bob said, still in that foreign language, "you don't just *know* anything. Come on. We can't leave Robert alone with that criminal."

But Bob was so fascinated at the sight through the one-way walls of Robert's room that we both stood and watched.

There were two cats, and Tina Louise was spitting at her double.

"That's right," Smitty was saying. "Leave that old real cat alone. What an ex-con wants to do, see, is stay out of trouble. Your old lady catches you clipping the fur off her cat, she'll have your hide. This way, see, you do what you want and she can't say a thing."

"Dat right?" Robert said, his eyes shining.

"Right. Now go ahead."

Robert clipped to his heart's content. He clipped until the pseudocat disappeared completely.

Tina Louise stomped out, her eyes glassy. She hasn't been the same since.

"What would you like for dinner, Smitty?" I asked.

"Spinach," he said. "Hamburger steak and baked potato. A glass of milk."

"Me too," Robert cried.

There was a howl from the kitchen. "Who the hell is this cold luncheon meat sandwich for?"

"I dialed it for you," I said, "because you were so nasty about the souffle."

"I wasn't nasty—"

"Now, Miss," Smitty said reprovingly, "that's no dinner to give your old man when he's just come home from a hard day's work."

"Why does everybody think he works so hard? He doesn't work hard." I was beginning to feel a little hysterical.

A long-toothed monster with two heads and green prickles came lumbering in. I grabbed Robert's rubber knife and slashed it to pieces.

"You ruined my monster!" Robert wailed.

"You oughtn't ruin his monster," Smitty told me reprovingly.

"Oh, for God's sake!" I screamed. I burst into tears and threw myself on the sofa. "To hell with all of you."

"Now, now," Smitty said soothingly. "This is no time to give up. We're doing fine with Robert and you're just the kind of woman your husband needs. It's just that . . ."

"That *what?*"

"You'd only get mad if I told you."

Smitty went out, and came back shortly with a couple of glasses of what looked like liquid lipstick. "It's a Bloody Paradise," he said in answer to my look.

"What's in them?" I asked.

"You wouldn't enjoy it if I told you. It's something I learned about before my Readjustment. I got special knowledge, see, and there are times when it comes in handy."

Even one sip of a Bloody Paradise is nice, and half of one gives the general effect of living under water. Under water, Bob began to look positively human. The look in his eyes was not in a foreign language.

I opened my mouth to say, "Now why don't you look at me that way all the time?" But my vocal cords were frozen. I couldn't say a word.

Smitty came out of the kitchen and grinned at me. "That one thing wrong with you," he recalled. "You talk too much."

I heard the door to the Family Room slide down softly behind Smitty.

It was an entirely successful evening.

There really aren't any words that beat a little human contact.

MEMO AT THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

I never saw a purple cow
And no one seems to need one.
But if the budget will allow,
We must attempt to breed one.

—Hilbert Schenck, Jr.

The Good Doctor here discourses on the cumbersome character of calendars and suggests an improvement—in the course of which he reveals a surprising fact about the true date of Washington's birth.

ABOUT TIME

by Isaac Asimov

OCCASIONALLY, IN SCIENCE FICTION, WE ARE FORCED TO TAKE notice of the fact that once mankind spreads through various stellar systems, questions of calendar and time-keeping will arise. Sometimes, an author takes care of this by having an extra-terrestrial character say: "We live fifteen Xylchpian years, which is the equivalent of about two hundred and forty-five of your Earthly years." That shows he is at least aware of the problem.

Or else, the writer, early in the game, mentions something about Interstellar Time, or Galactic Standard, and then lets it go, the implication being that the time kept by people generally is equivalent to that kept on the Earth.

Well, that does seem pretty inevitable. Obviously, for matters confined to a newly colonized planet, it would be convenient to prepare a new time-scale in keeping with the planet's own peculiar motions. For instance, if the planet's day is equal to 23 Earthly hours, it would be reasonable to shorten the days, hours, minutes and seconds by 1/24 and keep all things as they have been. This would be Local Planetary Time and each planet could suit itself.

But for the sake of interstellar communication, transportation and trade, it would inevitably be wise to maintain some sort of uniform Galactic Standard Time after all. And that might very well be set equal to the Local Planetary Time of Earth. After all, things did get started here, and we have a long history and fair's fair.

Yet how nice it would be if the question of setting standards of time-keeping were to stimulate mankind into revising the whole system—at last—in the direction of reason and logic. In order to appreciate the *lack* of reason and logic under which we have labored throughout history, as far as time-keeping is concerned, let's take a quick look at our own Local Planetary Time.

We have three basic units of time, based on the motions of the Earth, Moon, and (in appearance) the Sun.

1) The "Solar Day" is the time from noon to noon, and is the period of rotation of the Earth (relative to the Sun).

2) The "Synodic Month" is the time from new moon to new moon and is the period of revolution of the Moon about the Earth (relative to the Sun).

3) The "Tropical Year" is the time from vernal equinox to vernal equinox and is the period of the (apparent) revolution of the Sun about the Earth.

Now these three units do not fit evenly together, the synodic month being equal to 29.530388 days, and the tropical year to 365.24220 days. It follows that any calendar which tries to handle all three is going to have its problems.

Yet early man needed some handy unit of time greater than a day, and the moon, with its prominent phases, was certainly a natural keeper of time. Once he got the idea that the various phases of the moon appeared with unvarying regularity, he was set. Instead of trying to count days, he could count moons and find his days in convenient chunks.

It seemed neatest to begin the month with the new moon (which in primitive times was considered to be a "new" moon in the literal sense). It was only natural, then, to watch evenings for the first appearance of the crescent moon immediately after sunset; and that sunset could be considered as the beginning of a new month.

Since the synodic month is approximately 29½ days long, successive crescent moons will be sometimes 29 sunsets apart and sometimes 30, pretty near alternately. Occasionally, because the synodic month was a trifle over 29½ days long, there might be two 30-day months in a row but this wasn't too bad. If you simply followed the moon, you couldn't go wrong.

The job of keeping track of the moon usually devolved on the priesthood (as being a conscientious and learned group, skilled in the arts of propitiation of gods and demons and with nothing much else to do anyway). Furthermore since time-keeping was found to be important to

proper methods of agriculture, and hence a matter of life and death, the time of the new moon became a matter of rites and ceremonies not to be dismissed lightly.

Even after astronomers worked up accurate mathematical formulas to predict in advance the night of the appearance of successive new moons, the priesthood went through the time-honored (pun intentional) ceremonies. The Roman high priest, the "pontifex maximus," for instance, officially proclaimed the first appearance of the new moon each month, and since the Latin word for "proclaim" is "calare," the first day of the month was called the "calends" and a table of months is now called a "calendar."

Furthermore, the phases of the moon could be most easily distinguished at four prominent stages: new moon, first quarter (half moon on the increase), full moon, and last quarter (half moon on the decrease.) These are 7.382597 days apart or, rounding off to the nearest whole number, 7 days apart. The Babylonians therefore divided the month into 7 day portions for easier handling. The Jews picked up that habit during the Babylonian captivity and the early Christians inherited it and spread it to the Graeco-Roman world. As a result, we now have the unit of time called the "week."

The use of such a purely lunar calendar turned out to be a rough guide to the seasons (as mankind must have quickly learned) and this was what made it to valuable to farmers. Every twelve months it was (roughly) planting time again, or harvest time again, or sunstroke time again, or blizzard time again. Perhaps it was this fitting of twelve months into one cycle of seasons that made twelve such a popular magic number (twelve signs of the Zodiac, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve labors of Hercules, etc.). That, and the fact that by good chance, 12 happens to be the smallest number that is evenly divisible by 2, 3, and 4 (and 6, too). To societies that have not learned how to handle divisions that don't come out even, this is an important factor. (Again the pun is intentional. All my puns are intentional.)

But there was a flaw in this, based on the fact that the lunar month and the tropical year are not commensurable and it is the tropical year that governs the seasons, not the lunar month. Twelve synodic months do not make exactly a tropical year. Twelve synodic months equal 354.364656 days which is 10.87755 (call it 10⅞) days short. After twelve lunar months have passed, 10⅞ days must pass in addition before the Sun is back in position, say of equinox or of solstice. After two sets of twelve lunar months have passed, 21¾ days must pass before the Sun is back in position. After three sets of twelve lunar months

have passed, roughly one additional lunar month must pass and so on.

Each lunar year (made up of twelve lunar months) falls further behind the seasons. By the time 18 lunar years have passed, the month that originally marked planting time now marks harvest time while the month of sunstroke has become the month of blizzards. Another 18 lunar years and once more they mark planting time and sunstroke time respectively.

This is annoying and a bothersome complication for farmers, who must live by the seasons, yet some groups keep the lunar months untouched and let the seasons fall where they will. The Mohammedan calendar is of that type, losing three full laps on the seasons every century. It is for this reason that the fasting month of Ramadan, when loyal Moslems may not touch water from sunrise to sunset, will every generation work its way through the hottest time of the year, to the vast discomfort of all.

Usually, however, a society with such a lunar calendar will not allow the seasons to fall out of step. They will wait until the months have fallen a full month behind the seasons and will then add an additional or "intercalary" month. Naturally, they will try to find some regular or automatic way of doing this.

The Hebrew calendar, for instance, groups the tropical years into sets of 19 (because 19 tropical years equals almost exactly 235 synodic months so that the twentieth year starts off from scratch with a new moon). Nineteen groups of 12 synodical months, however, comes out to 228 synodic months, so 7 intercalary months must be added here and there to keep things even. This is done by adding an intercalary month to the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th year of each set of 19. The Jews inherited this calendar from the Greeks and although it sounds complicated, it manages to keep time.

The Egyptians were the first to establish the fact that the tropical year was roughly 365 days long and they were also the first to abandon the moon and to arbitrarily lengthen the month to a flat 30 days. This meant the new moon drifted through the months and only rarely came at the beginning of the month, but the Egyptians didn't care. As long as they could foretell the date of the Nile flood easily by just looking at the calendar (the Nile flood following the Sun and not the Moon), the Moon could go to the devil. Of course, twelve months of 30 days each, comes to only 360, but the Egyptians added 5 holidays at the end, and that was that. This extraordinarily simple calendar was not adopted by other peoples because of the religious connotations that had grown about the month, which made it nearly untouchable.

Besides, the tropical year is actually about 365¼ days long so that every four years, the Egyptian calendar fell a day behind the Sun, and every 1460 years, it lost one full lap on the Sun. The Egyptian calendar worked its way through the seasons as the Mohammedan calendar did, but much more slowly. In the time of the Ptolemies, the Greek astronomers in Alexandria tried to reform the Egyptian calendar to allow for the quarter day but the Egyptian people would have none of it. What was good enough for their great-great-great-great-grandfathers was good enough for them.

Rome, meanwhile, had a perfectly miserable lunar calendar which the priestly class had allowed to fall into complete disorder. Julius Caesar therefore introduced the Egyptian calendar, *with* the refinement (thanks to his Alexandrian adviser, the astronomer Sosigenes) of a leap year, containing 366 days, every fourth year. On the debit side was the disruption of the even-lengthed months of the Egyptians and the substitution of an exasperating system whereby months have any number of days from 28 to 31.

This "Julian Calendar" has persisted until modern times, but it has its flaw, too. A leap year of 366 days every fourth year implies a tropical year of 365.25 days long on the average, when the true length is 365.24220 days. The Julian Year is, in other words, 11 minutes too long and every 128 years it gets a day ahead of the Sun. During the first few centuries of its existence the calendar was occasionally tinkered with and set to rights, but by the final days of the Roman Empire it was let loose to work automatically and by the 16th century, it had gained ten days on the Sun.

This was throwing a serious crimp into the Church holy days. The Church authorities realized that if this went on, then, after a few millennia, Easter would be coming in mid-summer and Christmas would be a spring festival.

So, in 1582, Pope Gregory XIII dropped ten days and set the year even with the Sun. To keep it from falling out of step again, he decreed the removal of three leap years every four centuries. That is, even century years not divisible by 400 were not to be leap-years. Thus, 1900 was not a leap-year in the Gregorian calendar, but was one in the Julian calendar. The year 2000, being divisible by 4 *and* by 400 will be a leap-year in both calendars.

The new Gregorian calendar is quite good. It assumes a year that is, on the average, 365.2425 days long. This is only 25 seconds longer than the true value of the tropical year, so that our present calendar won't gain a full day on the Sun for 3,400 years.

Protestant and Greek Orthodox countries hesitated to follow the Pope in this. Great Britain (and the American colonies) didn't make the change till 1752, by which time the Julian calendar had gained an eleventh day on the Sun, since the year 1700 was a leap year in the Julian but not in the Gregorian calendar. Eleven days were dropped while crowds rioted and yelled to have them back.

Russia didn't switch till after the 1917 Revolution and had to drop 13 days, two more having been gained in 1800 and 1900. The Orthodox Church, however, still holds to the Julian calendar to this day, which is why the Orthodox Christmas and Easter don't coincide with the days usually celebrated in the Western world.

(Incidentally, if you want to win an easy bet, offer a wager that Washington wasn't born on Washington's Birthday. He wasn't. He was born on February 22, 1732 by the Gregorian calendar, but when he was born, the colonies were on the Julian calendar, and the church records therefore record him as having been born on February 11, 1732.)

As for periods less than a day, we are the victims of the Babylonians. Day and night were considered separately until Roman times. (Hence the Bible in the first chapter of Genesis, carefully explains that the individual "days" of creation include both days and nights. For instance, verse 5, says "and the evening and the morning were the first day," verse 8 says "and the evening and the morning were the second day," and so on.)

Both day and night were divided into 12 hours (there's 12 again). Then, once time telling became accurate enough in the middle ages and early modern times, the hour was divided into 60 minutes and the minute into 60 seconds, by analogy with the divisions of the degree. The degree is the unit used to measure the movements of the heavenly bodies and since time-telling is based on heavenly motions, the analogy seemed obvious. And why by 60? Well, that was introduced by the Babylonians, probably because 60 was so convenient, being the smallest number capable of even division by 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 (also by 10, 12, 15, 20, and 30.)

And so we have a most miserable set of units of time, related to one another in all sorts of odd ways. To summarize:

60	seconds	=	1 minute
60	minutes	=	1 hour
24	hours	=	1 day

	7	days	= 1 week
4 to	4 3/7	weeks	= 1 month
	12	months	= 1 year

Nowhere in the list is there to be found the one factor which is made natural by the anatomy of our hands and by the consequent structure of our number system—ten. This only occurs for units of time longer than a year (10 years make a decade, 10 decades a century, and 10 centuries a millennium) and for units of time shorter than a second (a millisecond is a thousandth of a second, and a microsecond is a millionth of a second).

These units above a year and below a second are rarely used in every day life, however, and for those units we deal with constantly there is no trace of a decimal system. And that means endless difficulties.

For instance, one of the most common and necessary usages of time-units is the calculation of time-lapse. If you are cooking, or running scientific experiments or keeping an appointment or allowing for travel-time, you might want to know what the time lapse is between 3:15 P.M. (which is the time you're aiming at) and 11:37 A.M. which is, let us say, the current time.

If it were a usual problem in arithmetic you would say: 3:15 minus 11:37, and where would that get you? Even if you adopt the armed services system and refer to the later time as 15:15, that would leave you with 15:15 minus 11:37 or 3 hours and 78 minutes by ordinary arithmetic, which is nonsense by the clock. The correct answer is 3 hours and 38 minutes. It gets even more complicated if you throw in seconds.

Then suppose you want to know the lapse of time between two dates, as bankers and astronomers and accountants often do. How many days between February 15 and May 3? Go ahead. How many? You have to work it out on your fingers or get a calendar and start figuring. Suppose you write the dates using figures for months. May 3 is 5/3 (or 5/03, if you prefer) and February 15 is 2/15. Well, then, how much is 5/03 minus 2/15? Ordinary arithmetic will not give you the correct answer of 77 days (or 78 if it is Leap Year).

If you have a calendar that gives you the individual number of each day, that would help but only if the two dates were in the same year.

What needs to be done to bring time-telling into line with ordinary arithmetic is to make time-telling a thoroughly decimal manipulation. This can't be done if we're going to use three different incommensurable

fundamental units. So let's just pick one; the most fundamental one —the day.

To begin with, let's divide the day by tens. To keep things as familiar as possible, we can use the old names for the time division, but in honor of the new decimal arrangement, let's prefix the word "metric" to those names. In other words, each day can be broken up into 10 "metric hours," each metric hour into 100 "metric minutes" and each metric minute into 100 "metric seconds." These can be broken down to "metric milliseconds" and "metric microseconds" if you wish, but I'll quit at the metric seconds.

Working upward, 10 days make a "metric week," 10 metric weeks a "metric month," and 10 metric months a "metric year." Year can continue on to "metric decades," "metric centuries" and "metric millennia" if you wish, but I'll stop at metric years.

Let's summarize this in a small table, indicating the relationship between these metric units and our ordinary time units.

Metric units	ordinary units
1 metric year	1,000 days = 2.74 years
1 metric month	100 days = 3.32 months
1 metric week	10 days = 1.43 weeks
1 day	1 day
1 metric hour	0.1 day = 2.40 hours
1 metric minute	0.001 day = 1.44 minutes
1 metric second	0.00001 day = 0.86 seconds

Are you wondering whether all this is really necessary? (I'll bet the kindly editor is.) Well, perhaps not necessary, since we've gotten along without it so many years, but consider how convenient it would be.

If one event happens at 2/15/35 of the day in metric time units (that is, 35 metric seconds after 15 metric minutes after 2 metric hours after the beginning of the day) and the second event is to happen at 9/08/12, then the time lapse is 9/08/12 minus 2/15/35, or 6/92/77; or 6 metric hours, 92 metric minutes and 77 metric seconds; a result achieved by ordinary arithmetic without frills.

Naturally, in such a system, the first metric hour of the day should be numbered 0, as should the first metric day of the metric week, the first metric week of the metric month and so on. This may sound queer but it is the logical way of doing it, and only sounds queer because we have been illogical for so long. The first minute of the hour *is* numbered 00 even in our ordinary system. For instance, the time repre-

sented by 15 seconds after 6 A.M. sharp is written 6:00:15. In the case of minutes and seconds we happen in this respect to be logical.

The days of the metric year can be numbered in logical fashion. The 16th day of the first metric month would be 0/1/6 (that is, 1 metric week and 6 days after the beginning of the year) while the 54th day of the seventh metric month would be 7/5/4 (7 metric months, 5 metric weeks and 4 days after the beginning of the year.) The time lapse between the two would be 7/5/4 minus 0/1/6, or 7/3/8; that is, seven metric months, three metric weeks, eight days, obtained by ordinary arithmetic.

You can leave out the shilling marks and combine units of days and more, with units less than a day by using a decimal point. Thus 754.21535 would be 7 metric months, 5 metric weeks, 4 days, 2 metric hours, 15 metric minutes and 35 metric seconds after the beginning of the year.

You can switch from one unit to another by just shifting the decimal point. Thus 754.21535 days is equal to 75.421535 metric weeks or to 7.5421535 metric months or to 0.75421535 metric years. Pushing the decimal point the other way, 754.21535 days is equal to 7542.1535 metric hours, 754215.35 metric minutes and, of course, 75421535 metric seconds.

The last day of the metric year would be numbered 999, and the day after would be 1000. Write it 1/000 and it would clearly be the first day of the second metric year (the first metric year would have the number, 0, of course). You could continue right up through the metric years and have 22/154 or 573/038 and so on.

Yet, though all this is arithmetically neat and clean, you may wonder about the seasons? The metric units do not fit the seasons at all and everybody would need a conversion table to know at what time (or times) in a given metric year to expect hot weather or blizzards or harvest moons or spring fever and all the rest of it.

Ah, but it is a Standard Galactic time I am talking about, and not Local Planetary time. I'm suggesting a time scale to be used by all the planets of the Milky Way, which will all have different seasons of different sorts anyway.

And yet—

And yet the funny part of it is that this very system I have been describing is in use today right here on Earth. Let me explain.

At the time that the Gregorian calendar was being introduced, various conservative people found the change in date confusing, and one

astronomer grew sick of the whole mess. He was an Italian named Joseph Justus Scaliger.

He reasoned that months and years had been shifted and shifted until no one could ever calculate the time-lapse between two dates without incredible tedium. Yet in following the motions of the heavenly bodies, astronomers (and astrologers too) had to know that time-lapse. Well, the one time unit that had never been fooled with was the day itself. Why not, thought Scaliger, simply number the days and be done with it.

The only difficulty was to find a particular day that would do as Day 1. Naturally, such a day should be far enough in the past so that astronomers would not be very likely to run into negative day numbers in keeping their records, in calculating backward for eclipses and so on. Nor should it be too far back, lest the number assigned to modern days be needlessly large.

What Scaliger did, then, was to take what was called the "Julian Cycle" which consisted of 7,980 Julian years. In such a cycle there are an even number of synodic months and a few other units of time much used by the ancient world. In other words, a number of varieties of time-measure all started from scratch simultaneously every 7,980 years.

Calculating backward, it turned out that the last time they had all started from scratch was on January 1, 4713 B.C. (They will all be at the starting post again, therefore, on January 1, 3267 in the Julian calendar, which will be about March 1, 3267 in the Gregorian calendar.)

Scaliger therefore suggested that January 1, 4713 B.C. be assigned the number, 1 (I wish he had assigned it 0, to be completely logical) and that all days be numbered consecutively thereafter. This system is now used in astronomy and each day has its own number which is independent of the type of calendar, whether lunar or solar, whether Julian or Gregorian. This number is called the "Julian Day." (That sounds as though it has some connection with the Julian calendar or with Julius Caesar, but it hasn't. Scaliger, in a fit of filial piety, decided to name the system in honor of his father, Julius Scaliger.)

The Julian Day begins at noon and is broken up into tenths, hundredths, thousandths and so on, rather than into hours, minutes and seconds. Thus, 3:15:30 P.M. of Julian Day 125 would be 125.13580. This is the actual way in which astronomers would record that time and this is equivalent to my system of saying it is 1 metric hour, 35 metric minutes and 80 metric seconds after the start of Julian Day 125

Now let's look a little further. The stock market crash took place on October 29, 1929, the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the invasion of Korea on June 24, 1950, and I am writing this article on November 23, 1959. To calculate the time lapse between any of these dates to the nearest day is tedious.

But each of these dates has a Julian Day number associated with it, and, if my own calculations are correct, here they are:

October 29, 1929—J.D. 2,425,914
December 7, 1941—J.D. 2,430,336
June 24, 1950—J.D. 2,433,457
November 23, 1959—J.D. 2,436,896

These numbers fit in with my metric time units of course. The stock market crash took place 2 metric millennia, 4 metric centuries, 2 metric decades, 5 metric years, 9 metric months 1 metric week and 4 days after the beginning of the Julian Day cycle. Or, if you prefer, it happened 2425.914 metric years after, or 914 days after the beginning of metric year 2,425.

Anyway, suppose calendars carried Julian Days with each date and that when dates were given in histories or in almanacs, the Julian Day number was also included. How simple it would be to know that, as I write, the stock market crash was 10,982 days ago (or, if you prefer, 10.982 metric years ago) that the time lapse between our entry into World War II and the start of the Korean war was 3,121 days (or 3.121 metric years).

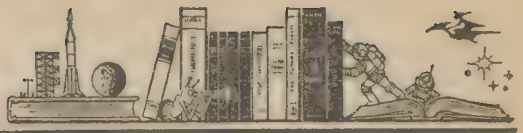
And to top it off my own age as of now (November 23, 1959) is exactly 14.570 metric years. You have enough information now to calculate out the date of my birth, but you needn't! That date is getting to be disgustingly far back in time and I'd rather not be reminded. [1]

[1] I am even older, by just a few days, than the kindly editor. [2]

[2] The Good Doctor's customary phenomenal accuracy deserts him here—"few" is hardly the just word.—THE KINDLY EDITOR [3]

[3] All right—forty lousy days.—THE GOOD DOCTOR

BOOKS



THE BEST OF 1959

by Damon Knight

YESTERDAY AND THE DAY BEfore, I went around the house and gathered up all the 1959 s.f. books I could find. Not counting paper reprints, there were 68; and in spite of my friend Earl Kemp, who has been circulating a questionnaire on "Who killed science fiction?", it does not seem to me that science fiction is very dead.

For publishers, it's true, 1959 was a year in which s.f. was sick. Except for Avalon, which cuts its novels to 40,000 words—about 2/3 anybody else's minimum—no hardcover house had anything that could be described as an s.f. novel program; the list of last year's publishers is almost as long as the list of titles.

Nearly everybody tried to cut costs. Dutton's and Simon & Schuster's s.f. volumes are petite, Avalon's are skinny; Doubleday's are printed in gray ink.

But for some, it was the year of the bargain. Martin Greenberg of Gnome Press enlarged his Pick-a-Book scheme to include the books of other publishers, e.g. Avalon and Fantasy Press. Among the paperbacks, Ballantine filled its list chiefly with reprinted British s.f. novels. But Ace's red-yellow-blue-and-white-spined Double Novel Books—two s.f. titles, back to back, at 35¢ the pair—were coming out one a month. At the end of the year, Ace announced a stepped-up schedule, and bought the rights to six of the annual BEST FROM F&SF volumes.

Nineteen fifty-nine is also memorable as the year in which some of s.f.'s most dependable writers began moving to other fields. Among the vanguard were L. Sprague de Camp, Poul Anderson, Edgar Pangborn, James Blish, Algis Budrys and Avram

Davidson. Some of these have got farther out of our field than others—Anderson, for instance, is still producing more science fiction than practically anybody; but some of them are all the way out, and say they are not coming back.

Partly because of this turnover in writers, partly because of the declining influence of the magazine s.f. serial, the books listed here are markedly different in character from those on previous annual lists. By and large, novels which supply the magazine requirements of excitement and suspense are still being written, but only by hacks; more accomplished writers have taken full advantage of the greater freedom offered by book publishers, and the results are ambiguous. There's a clear gain in literary values, cf. the Bowen, Vonnegut and Gordon; but the supply of dubious or outworn ideas has increased almost to the exclusion of new and sound ones.

A magazine editor in a position of dominance, like John Campbell in the 40s, was able to exercise a sense of proportion. If an oddball thing that he liked came along, he might publish it, but he wouldn't run two more in a row.

Nobody is exercising this function in the same way now, and I think we are in real danger of losing good science fiction altogether under a flood of variations. In two of the year's best novels, the Vonnegut and Bowen, the science is not merely defective, it's really not there at all, any more than in Bradbury's MARTIAN CHRONICLES. These are fables, and the s.f. backgrounds are simply convenient scenery.

To be honest, I'm not sure what it is that alarms me so much about these stories. An author's right to make up his own universe and put familiar labels on it is unquestioned; all good stories are dreams. Maybe it's just that I'm sensitive to public ignorance in this area: I would really and truly be happier in a world where every educated person knew the difference between a planet and a satellite; I cringe when I read a newspaper article about a rocket soaring "beyond the pull of gravity," and I cringe when I read a novel in which a character walks around unprotected on an airless planet.

NOVELS

The year's greatest strength was in s.f. novels, which I think is just as it should be. There were ten noteworthy titles published during the year, almost one a month; only the most insatiable reader could ask for more. The Vonnegut is a challenging innovation, about equally full of delights and annoyances; the rest are more conventional but almost

as brilliant. The Jackson is of course in a class by itself.

VANGUARD FROM ALPHA, by Brian W. Aldiss (Ace, 35¢)

AFTER THE RAIN, by John Bowen (Ballantine, 35¢)

SEED OF LIGHT, by Edmund Cooper (Ballantine, 35¢)

FIRST TO THE STARS, by Rex Gordon (Ace, 35¢)

STARSHIP SOLDIER, by Robert A. Heinlein (Putnam, $3.95)

THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE, by Shirley Jackson (Viking, $3.95)

WOLFBANE, by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth (Ballantine, 35¢)

THE FOURTH 'R', by George O. Smith (Ballantine, 35¢)

THE SIRENS OF TITAN, by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (Dell, 35¢)

THE OUTWARD URGE, by John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes (Ballantine, 35¢)

REISSUES

Two novels, although first published in 1924 and 1926 respectively, deserve special mention and a vote of thanks to the publishers who made them available again in 1959:

ENCHANTED BEGGAR (originally titled FLECKER'S MAGIC), by Norman Matson (Lippincott, $3.50)

WE, by Eugene Zamiatin (Dutton, $1.45)

SHORT STORIES

Brian Aldiss was voted a plaque at the 1959 World S.F. Convention as the year's most promising new writer. His highly styled short stories are completely individual, brilliantly venomous. C. M. Kornbluth's earlier collections contain the best of his short pieces; these are minor for the most part, but they have the authentic stamp of his talent.

NO TIME LIKE TOMORROW, by Brian Aldiss (Signet, 35¢)

THE MARCHING MORONS, by C. M. Kornbluth (Ballantine, 35¢)

ANTHOLOGIES

1959 was not the low watermark of s.f. and fantasy anthologies—by a rough handcount there were at least nine, as against six recorded by Anthony Boucher in 1956—but most were the usual tired collections, leaving only three worth noting:

A TREASURY OF GREAT SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Anthony Boucher (Doubleday, 2 vols., $5.95)

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, Eighth Series, edited by Anthony Boucher (Doubleday, $3.75)

S-F, the Year's Greatest Science Fiction and Fantasy, edited by Judith Merril (Dell, 35¢)

CRITICISM

One entry, but if only every

year produced one of this quality! The book consists of four essays, three of them brilliant, authoritative and stimulating.

THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL: Imagination and Social Criticism, by Robert A. Heinlien, Robert Bloch, C. M. Kornbluth and Alfred Bester (Advent, Box 9228, Chicago 90, Ill.)

SCIENCE BOOKS

I am not about to pose as an expert in this field, and the following list is by no means exhaustive: these are just a few science books that happened to fall under my eye, and that seemed to me of interest to s.f. writers and readers. The Butler is a fascinating survey of a field where major breakthroughs are being made.

WORDS OF SCIENCE, by Isaac Asimov (Houghton Mifflin, $5.00)

INSIDE THE LIVING CELL, by J. A. V. Butler (Basic Books, $3.50)

OUT OF THE SKY, an Introduction to Meteoritics, by H. H. Nininger (Dover, $1.85)

ANIMAL CAMOUFLAGE, by Adolph Portmann (University of Michigan, $4.50)

THE TEN BEST BOOKS OF THE 1950's

The list below excludes fantasy books, which would have made the problem unmanageable; it also excludes works published in magazines earlier than 1950. Otherwise, I made no restrictions; anthologies and story collections were invited to claw their way in past the novels, and one did.

I left out five novels which had given me much pleasure, because I did not honestly think I could answer "yes" to the question: "Would this book be worth a second reading?" Those that remain are, for me, the best of the best.

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, by Ray Bradbury (Doubleday, 1950)

THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON, by Robert A. Heinlein (Shasta, 1950)

THE PUPPET MASTERS, by Robert A. Heinlein (Doubleday, 1951)

CITY, by Clifford D. Simak (Gnome, 1952)

THE LONG, LOUD SILENCE, by Wilson Tucker (Rinehart, 1952)

THE DEMOLISHED MAN, by Alfred Bester (Shasta, 1953)

MORE THAN HUMAN, by Theodore Sturgeon (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1953)

MESSIAH, by Gore Vidal (Dutton, 1954, Ballantine, 1954)

SOMETIME NEVER, by John Wyndham, William Golding and Mervyn Peake (Ballantine, 1957)

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, by James Blish (Ballantine, 1948)

*An engineer and writer, Mr. Whitehill has published one novel—*THE ANGERS OF SPRING*—and one book of short stories—*ABLE BAKER AND OTHERS *(the title story won a 1956 O. Henry award). In his first F&SF appearance, he tells of a man whose power of concentration renders him dangerously unaware of his immediate environment.*

In The House, Another

by Joseph Whitehill

THE OTHER HAD REMAINED unseen in the house for hours. Hunching its dorsal structure and tilting its hairy skull sideways, it peered out into the dining room through the crack in the kitchen door. Its dark motionless eyes were fixed on the back of the man finishing his supper. Unaware of its presence, the man pushed back his chair, belched lightly, and stood up. The Other shuddered in disgust at the obscenity. The man stirred the Boxer at his feet until it woke and yawned with wet curled tongue, and stretched itself to its feet. The man took a scrap from his plate and tossed it to his dog, gathered his pipe and tobacco pouch from the sideboard, and, with the stiff walk of a full man, ambled out of sight into the living room. At his whistle, the dog followed. Though its neighborhood reputation was one of vicious aggression toward strangers, the dog, too, seemed unaware of the presence of the Other in the house.

The Other remained in the kitchen, slumped in frustration against the refrigerator. Patience. There was time enough. No need yet to advance upon this man they called the Thinker. The Other crossed its freckled forepaws over its thorax, distorting the two spongy bags hanging there. This distortion was habitual, and went unmarked. The Other waited, its conchoidal hearing organs alert to the sounds from the living room. All were homely sounds; the thump of another log added to the fire . . . the ringing rapping of the Thinker's pipe on the metal ashtray . . . his sensual groan as he settled into the big

deep chair before the fire . . . the scratching of the match and the spasmodic wheezy gurgling of the pipe as the Thinker drew it alive.

. . . Wait . . . wait. Not now. Later. Plenty of time. The Other sensed the first diffusion of the powerful tar esters of the tobacco smoke. Its sensitive olfactory neuro-termini rebelled, and its triangular proboscis twitched involuntarily.

The Thinker began to think. Mechanically, his hand sought out the dog's occiput, and he soothed both himself and the dog with his symbiotic scratching. *Required,* said his brain, *a stable amplifier capable of measurement of unipotential electrostatic charges of minimal magnitude. For purposes of discussion, assume a design point of five microvolt D.C. registration. . . .*

Twenty minutes passed. The dog had fallen asleep again, and the Thinker's pipe required relighting. He ignored it. *Direct amplification is out of the question, because random grid bias variation alone may reach five hundred microvolts.*

The Other moved quietly into the dining room, walking with a liquid lateral sway. It looked around the arched opening of the living room and gazed intently at the immobile form sunk in the chair. Dancing firelight played over his strong hard face, softening it almost to a boy's. The dog raised its head and looked at the Other, clinging there to the door jamb, then dropped his muzzle again between his forepaws. The Thinker did not stir. *Thus, a comparator must be devised which will convert applied D.C. potential into a proportional A.C. signal . . . .*

An inchoate wave of hunger swept over the observing Other. Its red claws indented the soft wood of the door jamb, and in a somatic wrench of restraint, it turned and climbed the stairs. In its climbing it made a distinctly audible swishing sound, and under its weight a loose stair tread skirled loudly. In the living room, the sleeping dog's ear flicked at the sound of the squeaking board, but the Thinker thought on.

He was a skilled concentrator, with his brain an obedient assistant. His ears had heard the sounds of the moving Other, but their alerting message had been silenced at his thalamic switchboard. The ratiocination must not be intruded upon. *Currently available D.C. to A.C. converters are either synchronous switches or synchronously excited capacity diaphragms. . . .*

Upstairs, the Other moved wraithlike through the rooms, looking, touching, searching. It encountered a chair draped with the Thinker's soiled linen. It clawed among the linen in an aimless

fashion, grasping pieces at random and elevating them to its eye level. It found a stocking and rammed its clawed forepaw into the opening all the way down to the toe, then held up the encased limb and swivelled it, looking at it from all sides with blank, unblinking eyes. It inspected a hole in the heel of the sock through which it could see its own skin color against the white of the sock. Enraged, it ripped off the sock, turning it inside out, and flung it onto the dresser. In futile irritation, it moved jerkily about the room, eyes flickering over the furniture and passing on. All these things around it were possessions of the Thinker downstairs. He had sat in each chair here, he had slept in that bed . . . his presence impinged on the Other's consciousness even up here where it had gone to lie in wait. He *must* come soon. This hunger could not be allayed so for long. It was becoming a crying, keening thing, imperious, and insatiable by such titillating hints of the real man, warm and soft, as lay all around it.

As if to torture itself, the Other swayed into the bathroom and began examining the personal toilet articles of the Thinker. It held up a razor and tossed it idly in one paw. With its prehensile claws, it opened the shaving lotion and sniffed. It swirled the badger brush around in the wooden shaving bowl to see the lather rise. Why does he not come?

An hour passed. The winter night chill crept into the house, drawing tight the strands of tense silence.

Feedback of at least a hundred db *will be required to stabilize the amplifier's A.C. gain characteristic.* . . . The Thinker's pipe had burned down to a bitter dottle in the bottom of the bowl. The fitful firelight cast only occasional candle-bright glimpses of the room where he sat. The dog snored gently and stirred in its deep sleep. *Electromagnetic excitation of the moving diaphragm requires objectionably large quantities of A.C. fundamental energy.* . . .

At last the Other could wait no longer. It descended the stairs with haste and entered the living room. Its claw found the switch of the living room light, but it hesitated.

Its incarnadine labia gaped and it spoke.

"Dear, aren't you *ever* coming to bed?"

NOTE: *It is perhaps only fair to report that Mrs. Whitehill, a charming, lovely creature, is in no way—to the best of our knowledge—a prototype, and gave her gracious permission for the use of this story* . . . .

The Yarans were a highly humanoid race with a highly unhuman philosophy—they thought life was a game. And the ground rules on Yara demanded that Earthmen play the game with them, which meant that the girl who had gone off into the interior alone was in a particularly sticky spot. The point being that if the girl should lose, and die, the entire human settlement on Yara would have to leave the planet in disgrace. . . .

THE GAME OF FIVE

by Gordon R. Dickson

"YOU CAN'T DO THIS!" THE BIG young man was furious. His blunt, not-too-intelligent looking features were going lumpy with anger. "This is—" He pounded the desk he sat before with one huge fist, stuck for a moment as to just what it could be—"it's illegal!"

"Quite legal. A Matter of Expediency, Mr. Yunce," replied the Consul to Yara, cheerfully, waving a smoke tube negligently in his tapering fingers. The Consul's name was Ivor Ben. He was half the size of Coley Yunce, one third the weight, twice the age, fifteen times the aristocrat—and very much in charge.

"You draft me all the way from Sol Four!" shouted Coley. "I'm a tool designer. You picked me off the available list yourself. You knew my qualifications. You aren't supposed to draft a citizen anyway, except you can't get what you want some other way." His glare threatened to wilt the Consul's boutonniere, but failed to disturb the Consul. "Damn Government seat-warmers! Can't hire like honest people! Send in for lists of the men you want, and pick out just your boy—never mind he's got business on Arga IV ten weeks from now. And now, when I get here you tell me I'm *not* going to design tools."

"That's right," said the Consul.

"You want me for some back-alley stuff! Well, I won't do it!" roared Coley. "I'll refuse. I'll fill a protest back at Sol—" He broke off suddenly, and stared at the Consul. "What makes you so sure I won't?"

The Consul contemplated Coley's thick shoulders, massive frame and a certain wildness about Coley's blue eyes and unruly black hair, all with obvious satisfaction.

"Certain reasons," he said, easily. "For one, I understand you grew up in a rather tough neighborhood in old Venus City, back on Sol II."

"So?" growled Coley.

"I believe there was something in your citizen's file about knives—"

"Look here!" exploded Coley. "So I knew how to use a knife when I was a kid. I had to, to stay alive in the spaceport district. So I got into a little trouble with the law—"

"Now, now—" said the Consul, comfortably. "Now, now."

"Using a man's past to blackmail him into a job that's none of his business. *'Would I please adjust to a change in plans, unavoidable but necessary—'* Well, I don't please! I don't please at all."

"I'd recommend you do," interrupted the Consul, allowing a little metal to creep into his voice. "You people who go shopping around on foreign worlds and getting rich at it have a bad tendency to take the protection of your Humanity for granted. Let me correct this tendency in you, even if several billion others continue to perpetuate the notion. The respect aliens have always given your life and possessions is not, though you may have thought so heretofore, something extended out of the kindness of their hearts. They keep their paws off people because they know we Humans never abandon one of our own. You've been living safe within that system all your life, Mr. Yunce. Now it's time to do your part for someone else. Under my authority as Consul, I'm drafting you to aid me in—"

"What's wrong with the star-marines?" roared Coley.

"The few star-marines I have attached to the Consulate are required here," said the Consul.

"Then flash back to Sol for the X-4 Department. Those Government Troubleshooters—"

"The X-4 Department is a popular fiction," said the Consul, coldly. "We draft people we need, we don't keep a glamorous corps of secret operators. Now, no more complaints Mr. Yunce, or I'll put you under arrest. It's that, or take the job. Which?"

"All right," growled Coley. "What's the deal?"

"I wouldn't use you if I didn't have to," said the Consul. "But there's no one else. There's a Human—one of our young lady tourists who's run off from the compound and ended in a Yaran religious center a little over a hundred miles from here."

"But if she's run off . . . of her own free will—"

"Ah, but we don't believe it was," said the Consul. "We think the Yarans enticed or coerced her into going." He paused. "Do you know anything about the Yarans?"

Coley shook his head.

"Every race we meet," said the Consul, putting the tips of his fingers together, "has to be approached by Humanity in a different way. In the case of Yara, here, we've got a highly humanoid race which has a highly unhuman philosophy. They think life's a game."

"Sounds like fun." said Coley.

"Not the kind of a game you think," said the Consul, undisturbed. "They mean Game with a capital G. Everything's a Game to be played under certain rules. Even their relationship as a race to the human race is a Game to be played. A Game of Five, as life is a game of five parts—the parts being childhood, youth, young adulthood, middle age and old age. Right now, as they see it, their relations with Humanity are in the fourth part—Middle Age. In Childhood they tried passive indifference to our attempt to set up diplomatic relations. In Youth, they rioted against our attempt to set up a space terminal and human compound here. In Young Adulthood they attacked us with professional soldiery and made war against us. In each portion of the game, we won out. Now, in Middle Age, they are trying subtlety against us with this coercion of the girl. Only when we beat them at this and at the Old Age portion will they concede defeat and enter into friendly relations with us."

Coley grunted.

"According to them, Sara Illoy —that's the girl—has decided to become one of them and take up her personal Game of Life at the Young Adulthood stage. In this stage she has certain rights, certain liabilities, certain privileges and obligations. Only if she handles these successfully, will she survive to start in on the next stage. You understand," said the Consul, looking over at Coley, "this is a system of taboo raised to the nth level. Someone like her, not born to the system, has literally no chance of surviving."

"I see," said Coley. And he did.

"And of course," said the Consul, quietly, "if she dies, they will have found a way to kill a member of the human race with impunity. Which will win them the Middle Age portion and lose us the game, since we have to be perfect to win. Which means an end to us on this world; and a bad example set that could fire incidents on other non-human worlds."

Coley nodded.

"What am I supposed to do about it?" he asked.

"As a female Young Adult," said the Consul, "she may be made to

return to the compound only by her lover or mate. We want you to play the young lover role and get her. If you ask for her, they must let her go with you. That's one of the rules."

Coley nodded again, this time cautiously.

"They have to let her go with me?" he said.

"They have to," repeated the Consul, leaning back in his chair and putting the tips of his fingers together. He looked out the tall window of the office in which he and Coley had been talking. "Go and bring her back. That's your job. We have transportation waiting to take you to her right now."

"Well, then," growled Coley, getting to his feet. "What're we waiting for? Let's get going and get it over with."

Three hours later, Coley found himself in the native Yaran city of Tannakil, in one of the Why towers of the Center of Meaning.

"Wait here," said the native Yaran who had brought him; and walked off leaving him alone in the heavily-draped room of the hexagonal wooden tower. Coley watched the Yaran leave, uneasiness nibbling at him.

Something was wrong, he told himself. His instincts were warning him. The Yaran that had just left him had been the one who had escorted him from the human compound to the native seacoast town outside it. They had taken a native glider that had gotten its original impulse by a stomach-sickening plunge down a wooden incline and out over a high sea-cliff. Thereafter the pilot with a skill that—Coley had to admit—no human could have come close to matching, had worked them up in altitude, and inland, across a low range of mountains, over a patch of desert and to this foothill town lying at the toes of another and greater range of mountains. Granted the air currents of Yara were more congenial to the art of gliding, granted it was a distance of probably no more than a hundred and fifty miles, still it was a prodigious feat by human standards.

But it was not this that had made Coley uneasy. It was something in the air. It was something in the attitude of the accompanying Yaran, Ansash by name. Coley considered and dismissed the possibility that it was the alienness of Ansash that was disturbing him. The Yarans were not all that different. In fact, the difference was so slight that Coley could not lay his finger upon it. When he had first stepped outside the compound, he had thought he saw what the difference was between Yarans and humans. Now, they all looked as Earth-original as any humans he had ever seen.

No, it was something other than physical—something in

their attitudes. Sitting next to Ansash in the glider on the trip here, he had felt a coldness, a repulsion, a loneliness—there was no point in trying to describe it. In plain words he had *felt* that Ansash was not human. He had felt it in his skin and blood and bones: *—this is a thing I'm sitting next to, not a man.* And for the first time he realized how impossible and ridiculous were the sniggering stories they told in bars about interbreeding with the humanoids. These beings, too, were alien; as alien as the seal-like race of the Dorcan system. From the irrational point of view of the emotions, the fact that they looked exactly like people only made it worse.

Coley took a quick turn about the room. The Yaran had been gone for only a couple of minutes, but already it seemed too long. Of course, thought Coley, going on with his musings, it might be something peculiar to Ansash. The glider pilot had not made Coley bristle so. In fact, except for his straight black hair—the Yarans all had black hair, it was what made them all look so much alike—he looked like any friendly guy on any one of the human worlds, intent on doing his job and not worried about anything else. . . . Was Ansash never coming back with that girl?

There was a stir behind the draperies and Ansash appeared, leading a girl by the hand. She was a blonde as tall as the slighter-boned Yaran who was leading her forward. Her lipstick was too red and her skin almost abnormally pale, so that she looked bleached-out beside Ansash's native swarthiness. Moreover, there was something sleepwalking about her face and the way she moved.

"This is Sara Illoy," said Ansash, in Yaran, dropping her hand as they stopped before Coley. Coley understood him without difficulty. Five minutes with a hypno-teacher had given him full command of the language. But he was staring fascinated at the girl, who looked back at him, but did not speak.

"Pleased to meet you," said Coley. "I'm Coley Yunce, Sol II."

She did not answer.

"Are you all right?" Coley demanded. Still she looked up at him without speaking and without interest. There was nothing in her face at all. She was not even curious. She was merely looking.

"She does not speak," the voice of Ansash broke the silence. "Perhaps you should beat her. Then she might talk."

Coley looked sharply at him. But there was no expression of slyness or derision on the Yaran's face.

"Come on," he growled at the girl, and turned away. He had taken several steps before he realised she was not following. He turned back to take her by the

hand—and discovered Ansash had disappeared.

"Come on," he growled again; and led the girl off to where his memory told him he and Ansash had entered through the drapes. He felt about among the cloth and found a parting. He towed the girl through.

His memory had not tricked him. He was standing on the stairs up which he and Ansash had come earlier. He led the girl down them and into the streets of Tannakil.

He paused to get his bearings with his feet on the smoothly fitted blocks of the paving. Tannakil was good-sized as Yaran towns went, but it was not all that big. After a second, he figured out that their way back to the glider field was to their right, and he led the girl off.

This was part of the Yaran attitude, he supposed; to deprive him of a guide on the way back. Well, they might have done worse things. Still, he thought, as he led Sara Illoy along, it was odd. No Yaran they passed looked at them or made any move to show surprise at seeing two obvious humans abroad in their town. Not only that, but none of the Yarans seemed to be speaking to each other. Except for the occasional hoof-noises of the Yaran riding-animal—a reindeer-like creature with a long lower lip—the town was silent.

Coley hurried on through the streets. The afternoon was getting along; and he did not fancy a flight back over those mountains at dusk or in the dark, no matter how skillful the Yaran pilots were. And in time the wooden Yaran buildings began to thin out and the two of them emerged onto the grassy field with its towering wooden slide, like a ski-jump, only much taller, up to which the gliders were winched, and down which they were started.

Coley had actually started to lead the girl toward the slide when the facts of the situation penetrated his mind.

The field was empty.

There were no gliders on its grass, at the top of the slide, or winched partway up it. And there were no Yarans.

Coley whirled around, looking back the way he had come. The street he and the girl had walked was also empty. Tannakil was silent and empty—as a ghost town, as a churchyard.

Coley stood spraddle-legged, filled with sudden rage and fear. Rage was in him because he had not expected to find a joker in this expedition right at the start; and fear—because all the gutter instinct of his early years cried out against the danger of his position.

He was alone—in a town full of potential enemies. And night was not far off.

Coley looked all around him again. There was nothing; noth-

ing but the grass and the town, the empty sky, and a road leading off straight as a ruler toward the desert over which he had flown, toward the distant mountains, and the coast beyond.

And then he noticed two of the Yaran riding animals twitching up grass with their long lower lips, beside the road a little way off.

"Come on," he said to the girl, and led the way toward the animals. As he drew near, he could see that they had something upon their backs; and when he reached them he discovered, as he had half-expected, that they were both fitted with the Yaran equivalent of the saddle. Coley grinned without humor; and looked back toward the town.

"Thanks for nothing," he told it. And he turned to boost the girl into one of the saddles. She went up easily, as someone who had ridden one of the beasts before. He untethered her animal, passed the single rein back up into her hand, then unhitched and mounted the other beast himself. There was a knife tied to its leather pad of a saddle.

They headed off down the road into the descending sun.

They rode until it became too dark to see the road before them. Then Coley stopped and tethered the animals. He helped the girl down and unsaddled the beasts. The saddles came off—and apart—quite easily. In fact, they were the simplest sort of riding equipment. The equivalent of the saddlecloth was a sort of great sash of coarse but semi-elastic cloth that went completely around the barrel of the animal and fastened together underneath with a system of hooks and eyes. The saddle itself was simply a folded-over flap of leather that hook-and-eyed to the saddle cloth. Unfolded, Coley discovered the saddle was large enough to lie on, as a groundsheet; and the unfolded saddlecloth made a rough blanket.

He and the girl lay down to sleep until the moon rose. But Coley, not unsurprisingly, found sleep hard to come by. He lay on his back, gazing up at the sprinkling of strange stars overhead, and thinking hard.

It was not hard to realize he had been suckered into something. Coley had expected that. It was harder to figure out what he had been suckered into, and by whom, and why. The presence of the knife on his saddle pointed the figure at the Consul; but to suppose the Consul was in league with the humanoids ran counter to Coley's experience with a half a dozen non-human worlds. He was not inexperienced with aliens—his speciality was designing and adapting human-type tools for the grasping of alien appendages. He was only inexperienced with humanoids. Lying on his

back, he narrowed his eyes at the stars and wished he had found out more about the Consul.

Four hours after sunset, by Coley's watch, the moon rose. Coley had expected one sooner, since Yara was supposed to have two of them. But then he remembered hearing that the orbits of both were peculiar so that often neither would be visible over any given spot for several nights handrunning. He roused the girl, who got up without protest. They saddled and rode on.

Coley tried from time to time to get the girl to talk. But, although she would look at him when he spoke to her, she would not say a word.

"Is this something you did to yourself?" he asked her. "Or something they did to you? That's what I'd like to know."

She gazed solemnly at him in the moonlight.

"How about nodding your head for yes, or shaking it for no?" . . . He tried speaking to her in Yaran. When that failed, he tried upper middle English, and what he knew of Arcturan's local canting tongue. On a sudden chilling impulse, Coley urged his beast alongside hers, and, reaching out, pressed on her jaw muscles until she automatically opened her mouth. In the moonlight, he saw she still had her tongue.

"It's not that," he said. He had remembered certain ugly things done around the Spaceport district of Venus City. "So it must be psychological. I'll bet you were all right when you left the compound." He found himself clenching his teeth a little and thinking, for no obvious reason, of Ansash. To get his mind off it, he looked at his watch again.

"Time to stop and rest a bit, again," he said. "I want to get as far as possible across this desert at night, but there's no use killing ourselves right at the start."

He stopped the beasts, helped the girl down and unsaddled.

"A couple of hours nap," he said. "And then on we go." He set his watch alarm and fell asleep.

He woke up to broad daylight and hooting voices. Automatically, he leaped to his feet. One ankle tripped him and threw him down again. He lay there, half-propped on one elbow, seeing himself surrounded by a bunch of young Yarans.

His hand slipped quietly to his belt where he had tucked the knife from the saddle. To his astonishment, it was still there. He let his hand fall away from it, and pretending to be dazed, glanced around under half-closed eyelids.

Sara Illoy was not to be seen. Of the young Yarans around him —all of them uniformly dressed in a sort of grey loose robe or dress,

tightly belted at the waist—the large majority were male. None of them seemed to be paying any great attention to him. They were all hooting at each other without words and—well, not dancing so much as engaging in a sort of semi-rhythmic horseplay with each other. Most of the males carried knives themselves, tucked in their belts; and some had tucked in beside the knives a sort of pistol with an exaggeratedly long slim barrel and a bulbous handle.

Farther off, he could occasionally glimpse between the bounding and whirling bodies some of the riding animals, tethered in a line and contentedly twitching up grass. Coley measured the distance between himself and the beasts, speculated on the chance of making a run for it—and gave the notion up.

A thought about the girl occurred to him.

"But right now, kid," he thought silently to himself, "if I had the chance, it'd be everyone for himself and the devil take the hindmost. I wasn't raised to be a shining knight."

At the same time he admitted to himself that he was glad she wasn't around to see him, if he did have a chance to make a break for it—no reason to rub in the fact that she would be being abandoned. Then he went back to worrying about his own skin.

Coley had discovered in the gutters and back alleys of Venus City when he was young that the best cure for being afraid was to get angry. He had learned this so well that it had become almost automatic with him; and he began to feel himself growing hot and prickly under his shirt, now, as he lay still with his eyes half-closed, waiting. There would be a chance to go out fighting—he did have the knife.

Suddenly—so suddenly that he found himself unprepared for it—the roughhousing and hooting stopped and he found himself jerked to his feet. A knife flashed, and the tension of the rope binding his ankle fell away. He found himself standing, loosely surrounded by Yarans; and through the gaps between them he could see the line of riding animals clearly and close.

He almost took the bait. Then, just in time, he recognized what was before him as one of the oldest traps known to civilized beings. He had seen exactly the same trick played back in Venus City. He had played it, himself. The idea was to tempt the victim with the hope of an escape, to tempt him into running; and when he did, to chase and catch him again, cat-and-mouse fashion.

With this sudden realization, confidence came flooding back into him. The alienness of the situation melted away and he found

himself back in familiar territory. He stretched up to his full height, which was half a head taller than the tallest of the Yarans surrounding him; and smiled grimly at them, his eyes skipping from individual to individual as he tried to pick out the one that would be the leader.

He almost fell into the error of picking out the largest of the Yarans around him. Then he thought of a surer index of rank, and his eyes swept over the male Yarans at belt level, until they halted on one whose belt held two pistols, with matching butts. Coley smiled again and strode calmly forward toward the Yaran he had picked out.

With a sudden rush the Yarans spread out into a circle, leaving Coley and the male with two pistols inside. Coley halted within double his arms' length of the other, and hooked his thumbs into his own belt. His eye met that of the Yaran before him sardonically.

Up until now, the Yaran had not moved. But, as the circle reached its full dimension and went still, his right hand flashed to the butt of one of his pistols. In the same instant, Coley dropped to one knee. His knife flashed in his hand and glittered suddenly as it flew through the air.

And the Yaran fell, clutching at the knife in his chest.

A chorus of wild hoots went up; and when Coley glanced up from the male he had just knifed, the others were scrambling for their riding animals. Within seconds, they were mounted and gone, the dust of the desert rolling up behind them to mark their trail. Of the long line of riding animals, only two were left.

And, peering around the farther of these, was the girl.

Coley buried the Yaran he had killed, before he and the girl took up their road again.

Coley had expected the desert to be a man-killer by day. It was not—for reasons he did not understand, but guessed to have something to do with its altitude, and also the latitude in which this part of Yara lay. Still, it was hot and uncomfortable enough, and they had neither food or water with them. Luckily, later on in the day they came to a wayside well; the water of which, when Coley tasted it gingerly, proved to be sweet enough. He drank and handed the dipper to the girl.

She drank eagerly as well.

"Now, if we could just happen on something to eat," Coley told her. She showed no sign that she understood him, but, later in the day, when they came to the nearer foothills of the coastal mountain range, she rode off among the first trees they came to. When he followed her, he found her eating a black-skinned fruit about the size of a tangerine.

"Here, what are you doing?" shouted Coley, grabbing the fruit out of her hand. She made no protest, but picked another fruit from the small, wide-branched small tree or bush beside her. Seeing her bite into it without hesitation, Coley felt his alarm dwindle.

"I suppose they fed you some of these while you were there," he growled. He sniffed the fruit, then licked at it where the pulp was exposed. It had a rather sour, meaty taste. He took a tentative bite himself. It went down agreeably. He took another.

"Oh, well—what the hell!" he said. And he and the girl filled themselves up on the fruit.

That night, when they camped on the very knees of the mountains themselves, Coley lay stretched out under his animal-blanket, trying to sort out what had happened to them and make some sense from it.

The situation was the wildest he had ever encountered. If certain elements in it seemed to be doing their best to kill him (and undoubtedly the girl as well) off, other elements seemed just as determined to keep them alive. Tannakil had been a death-trap if they had lingered there after nightfall; he knew this as surely as if he had seen it written in Basic on one of the wooden walls there. But Tannakil had apparently provided the riding animals for their escape.

Those Yaran youngsters back there on the desert had not been fooling either. Yet they had ridden off. And the desert had been no joke; but the well had been just where it needed to be—and how come those fruit trees to be so handy, and how did the girl too recognize them, even some way back from the road?

Unthinkingly, he half-rolled over to ask her. Then it came back to him that she would not be able to answer; and he frowned. There was something about this business of the girl herself that was funny, too. . . .

Thinking about it, he fell asleep.

The next day, they pushed on into the mountains, finding pleasanter country full of shaggy-barked, low green trees, and green ground-covering of tiny, thick-growing ferns. They climbed steadily into cooler air, and the road narrowed until it was hardly more than a trail. The mountain tops ahead, at least, were free from snow, so that whatever happened, they would not have to contend with mountain storms and low temperatures, for which neither of them was dressed or equipped.

Then an abrupt and dramatic change took place. The road suddenly leveled out, and then began to dip downward, as if they had come into a pass. Moreover, it was now wider and more carefully en-

gineered than Coley had ever seen it before. And more than that, after a little while it began to sport a crushed rock topping.

They were walled in on both sides by steep rock, and were descending, apparently, into an interior mountain valley. Suddenly they heard a sharp hooting noise, twice repeated, from up ahead of them; and around the curve of the mountain road came a double line of Yarans mounted on running riding animals. The leading Yaran yelled a command, the riding animals were reined in and skidded to a halt; and one mounted Yaran who was holding a sort of two-handed bellows with a long, ornately carved tube projecting from it, pumped the device once, producing a single additional hoot which at this close range hurt Coley's eardrums.

These mounted Yarans were dressed in short grey kilts with grey, woolly-looking leggings underneath that terminated in a sort of mukluk over each foot, and bulky, thick, green sweater-like upper garments with parka-type hoods which they wore thrown back on their shoulders. They did not hold the single reins of their riding animals in their hands, but had them loosely looped and tied leaving their hands free—the right one to carry what was truly a fantastically long-barreled version of the bulbous-handled pistols Coley had encountered in the desert, the left one to be carried in a fist against the left hip, the elbow stylishly cocked out. They were all riding in this position when Coley first saw them; and the sudden sliding halt did not cause a single fist to slip. There was also both a short and a long knife in each man's green belt.

"Permissions?" snapped the Yaran on the lead animal; and continued without waiting for an answer. "None? You are under arrest. Come with me." He started to turn his animal.

"Wait a minute—" began Coley. The other paused, and Coley noticed suddenly that his belt was not green, like the others, but yellow. "Never mind," said Coley. "We're coming."

The yellow-belted Yaran completed his turn, nodded to the one with the bellows, and an ear-splitting hoot shook the air. One moment later Coley found himself and the girl on their animals in a dead run for the valley below, with mounted Yarans all about them. Forgetting everything else, Coley grabbed for the front edge of his saddle flap and concentrated on hanging on.

They swept around a curve and down a long slope, emerging into a sort of interior plateau area which looked as if it might be a number of miles in extent. Coley was unable to make sure of this—not only because most of his attention was concentrated on stay-

ing on his mount, but because almost immediately they were surrounded by circular small buildings of stone, which a little farther on gave way to hexagonal small buildings, which yet further on gave way to five-sided, then square, then triangular edifices of the same size. Beyond the triangular buildings was an open space, and then a large, stone structure of rectangular shape.

The bellows hooted, the troop slid to a stop. The yellow-belted Yaran dismounted, signalled Coley and the girl to get down as well, and led them in through a door in the large, rectangular building. Within were a good number of Yarans standing at tall desks arranged in a spiral shape within a large room. The yellow-belted Yaran went to one of these, apparently at random from all Coley could discover, and held a whispered conversation. Then he returned and led them both off through more doors and down halls, until he ushered them into a room about twenty feet square, furnished only with a pile of grey cushions neatly stacked in one corner, and one of the tall desks such as Coley had seen arranged spirally in the large room behind them. A male Yaran, dressed like all the rest except that he wore a silver belt, turned away from the room's single large window, and came to stand behind the tall desk.

"West Entrance. No permissions, Authority," spoke up the yellow-belted one behind Coley.

"Now, wait a minute—" began Coley. "Let me tell you how we happened to come this way—"

"You—" said the silver-belted Yaran, suddenly interrupting. "You speak the real language."

"Of course," said Coley, "that's part of why we happen to be here—"

"You are not one of the real people."

"No. I—"

"Confine yourself to simple answers, please. You are Human?"

"Yes," said Coley.

"A Human, speaking the real language, and here where you have no permission to be. A spy."

"No," said Coley. "Let me explain. Yesterday, our Consul . . ." He explained.

"That is your story," said the silver-belted Yaran. "There's no reason I should believe it—in view of the suspicious circumstances of your being here, an obvious Human, speaking the real tongue and without permission to be here. This young female will be taken into protective custody. You, as a spy, will be strangled."

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you," said Coley, "The old persons down on the coast have their own ideas about how to deal with Humans. If I were you, I'd at least check up on my story before I stuck my neck out by having a Human strangled."

"This is the Army," retorted the silver-belted Yaran. "The old persons down on the coast have no authority over us. They have nothing whatsoever to say about what we do with spies caught in restricted areas. I want you to understand that clearly." He stared at Coley with motionless black eyes for a long moment. "On the other hand," he continued, "it is, of course, regular Army routine to check up on the stories of spies before strangling them. As I was just about to say, when you interrupted me. Consequently, you will be allowed the freedom of the commercial area adjoining the military establishment under my command here. I warn you, however, against attempting to spy any further, or trying to leave the area without permission. The female will still be taken into protective custody."

He turned to the one in the yellow belt.

"Take him to the commercial area and turn him loose," he ordered. Numbly, Coley followed the yellow-belted Yaran out, casting a rather helpless glance at the girl as he passed. But the girl seemed as blandly unconcerned about this as she had about almost everything else. The Yaran with the yellow belt led Coley out of the building, had him remount, and rode with him to a far side of the camp where they passed a sort of gate in a stone wall and found themselves among a cluster of wooden buildings like those Coley had seen at Tannakil.

Here, the yellow-belted Yaran turned his animal and scooted back into the military compound on the run, leaving Coley sitting alone, on his beast, in the center of a cobbled street.

It was past noon when Coley was turned loose. For more than a couple of hours of the short Yaran day, he rode around the commercial area. It was actually a small town, its buildings set up as permanently as the ones in the military area. What he saw confirmed his original notion that, much as the human sort of army is the same everywhere, the human sort of civilian population that clings to its skirts is pretty much the same, as well. The town —a sign at its geographic center announced its name to be Tegat— revealed itself to be a collection of establishments for the feeding, drinking, and other pleasuring of off-duty soldiers. So had the spaceport district been, back at Venus City. True, the clients of the district had not exactly been soldiers; but there was much similarity between the uniformed breed and the men who worked the starships.

Once more, as he had in that moment back on the desert, Coley began to feel at home.

He considered his wealth, which consisted in Yaran terms of

his muscle, his knife, and the animal he was riding, and then he stopped a passing Yaran, a civilian type in an unbelted grey robe.

"Who around here lends money?" asked Coley. "And just how do I go about finding him."

The Yaran looked at him for a long moment without answering, and without any expression on his face that Coley could interpret. Then his thin mouth opened in the swarthy face.

"Two streets back," he said. "Turn right. Twelfth building, second floor. Call for Ynesh."

Coley went back, found the second street and turned right into it. This turned out to be little more than an alley; and Coley, moreover, found he had trouble telling where one building left off and another started, since they were all built firmly into each other. Finally, by counting doorways and making a hopeful guess, he entered what he believed was the twelfth building and, passing a couple of interior doors, strode up a ramp and found himself on a landing one floor up. Here there were three more doors. Coley stopped, perplexed; then he remembered that his instructions had been to *call* for Ynesh.

"Ynesh!" he yelled.

The door on the furthest right flew open as if his voice had actuated some sort of spring release. No one came out, however. Coley waited a moment, then walked face first into a hanging drape. He pushed his way past the drape and found himself in a circular room containing cushions and one tall desk behind which a middle-aged Yaran in an unbelted figured green robe was standing. One tall window illuminated the room.

"Live well," said the Yaran, "I am Ynesh. How much would you like to borrow?"

"Nothing," said Coley—although his empty stomach growled at this denial of the hope of the wherewithal to buy something to put in it. Ynesh did not stir so much as a finger that Coley could see, but suddenly three good-sized Yarans in belted, knee-length robes of blue-grey appeared from the drapes. They all had two knives in their belts.

"Don't misunderstand me," said Coley, hastily. "I wouldn't have come here unless I meant to do some business. How'd you like to make some money?"

Ynesh still stood without moving. But the three with knives disappeared back into the drapery. Coley breathed more easily. He walked forward to the desk and leaned close.

"I suppose," he said to the Yaran, "there's some sort of limit set on how much interest you can charge, and how much you can lend the ordinary soldier."

Ynesh parted his thin lips.

"For every grade an amount of credit commensurate with the pay

scale for that grade. The interest rate is one tenth of the principal in the period of one year, proportionately decreased for shorter lengths of time. This rate and amount is set by the military Authority in Chief. Everyone but a Human would know that, Human."

"Call me Coley," said Coley.

"Gzoly," replied the Yaran, agreeably.

"You wouldn't want to risk going above the amounts or charging a greater interest rate, I take it?" said Coley.

"And lose my license to lend?" said Ynesh. He had not pulled back from Coley. They were talking, Coley suspected, with more cozy intimacy than probably any Human and Yaran had talked to date. It was marvelous what the right sort of topic could do to eradicate awkwardness in communication between the races. "I would hardly be sensible to do that, Gzoly."

"What if somebody else would take the risks for you—say, take your money and lend it without a license, quietly, but for better than the usual rates of interest, in any amount wanted?"

"Now who, Gzoly, would do that?" said Ynesh.

"Perhaps certain soldiers wouldn't object to acting as agents," said Coley. "They borrow the money from you and relend to their fellow soldiers at higher rates? Under the blanket, no questions asked, money in a hurry."

"Ah, but I wouldn't be able to lend each one of them more than his grade-amount of credit, since it would surely be traced back to me," said Ynesh, but in no tone that indicated that he considered the topic closed. "Moreover, where would be the extra profit? I'd have to lend to them at legal rates." He paused, almost imperceptibly. The effect was that of a silent shrug. "A pity. But that is the Game."

"Of course," said Coley. "On the other hand, there are no rules set up for me. *I* could lend them as much as they wanted, at any rate I wanted. And also since I'm a Human, you could lend me the money originally at a higher-than-legal rate of interest."

"Ah," said Ynesh.

"I thought the idea would meet with your approval," said Coley.

"It might be worth trying in a limited way, Gzoly," said Ynesh. "Yes, I think it might. I will be glad to lend you a small trial sum, at, say, a fifth part in yearly interest."

"I'm afraid," said Coley, straightening up from the desk, "that you happen to be one of those real people who would cut open the insect that spins the golden nest. A fifth in interest would force me to relend at rates that would keep my agents from

finding any borrowers, after they had upped their own rates to make their cut. I'm afraid I couldn't do business with you unless I borrowed at no more than a ninth part."

"Ridiculous. I'm laughing," said Ynesh, without cracking a smile or twitching a facial muscle. "If you're one of those people who always like to feel they've beaten a little off the price for form's sake, I'll let you have your first sum at five and a half."

"Goodby," said Coley.

"Now, wait a minute," said Ynesh. "I might consider . . ." And the classical argument proceeded along its classical lines, terminating in a rate to Coley of eight and three-quarters part of the principal on a yearly basis.

"Now, the only question is," said Ynesh, after the rate had been settled, "whether I can trust you with such a sum as I had in mind. After all, what proof have I—"

"I imagine you've heard by this time," said Coley, drily. "The military Authority has confined me to this area. "If I try any tricks you won't have any trouble finding me."

"True," said Ynesh, as if the thought had just struck him for the first time. . . .

Coley went out with money in his pocket and intrigued the Yaran who sold food in one of the eating and drinking establishments by ordering a large number of different items and sampling them all in gingerly fashion. The search was not a particularly pleasant one for Coley's taste-buds; but he did eventually come up with a sort of a stew and a sort of a pudding that tasted reasonably well—and assauged a two days hunger. He also tried a number of the Yaran drinks, but ended up gagging on their oily taste and settled for water.

Then, having eaten and drunk, he glanced around the establishment. Not far off across the room a Yaran soldier with the green belt of the lower ranks was seated glumly at a table holding an empty bowl and a stick of incense that had burned itself completely out. Coley got up, went over and plumped down on a stool at the same table.

"Cheer up," he said. "Have a drink on me. And tell me—how'd you like to make some money. . . ?"

It took about a week and a half for Coley's presence in the commercial area and in the military establishment to make itself felt. Early the third day, Coley discovered where the girl was being held—in a sort of watchtower not far from the main gate. However, there was no getting in to her and obviously she could not get out—though from the few glimpses Coley had had of

her uninterested face when it occasionally showed itself at the window of the tower when he was watching, it was a good question whether she even wanted to.

Otherwise, however, things had gone well. Every day had become a little more comfortable. For one thing, Coley had discovered that the Yaran meats, in spite of their gamey taste, were quite satisfying if soaked in oil before, during, and after cooking. In addition to this, business was good; Coley having noticed that gambling was under as strict regulations as the lending of money, had thoughtfully started a chain-letter scheme to start the financial picture moving.

A desert takes no more thirstily to one of its infrequent rain showers than the Yaran soldiers took to both of Coley's schemes. The local money situation literally exploded; and ten days after Coley's arrival, he was escorted to the office of the Yaran Authority who had originally passed sentence upon him.

The Authority in his silver belt was as inscrutable as ever. He waited until he and Coley were alone together.

"All my officers are in debt," he said to Coley. "My common soldiers are become a rabble, selling their equipment to illegal buyers for money. The army treasury has been broken into and robbed. Where is all our money?"

"I couldn't tell you," replied Coley, who was being perfectly truthful. He knew only where about a fifth of the area's hard cash was—carefully hidden in his room. As for the rest, Coley suspected other prudent souls had squirreled most of the rest out of the way; and that in any case the sum the Authority had in mind was entirely illusory, resulting from vast quantities of credit multiplying the actual cash reserves of the area.

"I will have you tortured to death—which is illegal," said the Authority. "Then I will commit suicide—which is shameful but convenient."

"Why do all that?" said Coley, enunciating clearly in spite of a slight unavoidable dryness of the mouth—for though he had planned this, he realized the extreme touchiness of the situation at this stage. "Let me and the girl go. Then you can declare a moratorium on all debts and blame it on the fact I absconded with the funds."

The Authority thought a moment.

"A very good suggestion," he said, finally. "However, there's no reason I should actually let you go. I might as well have a little fun out of all this."

"Somebody might find out, if I didn't actually escape with the girl. Then the blame would fall on you."

The Authority considered again.

"Very well. A pity," he said. "Perhaps I shall lay hands on you again, some day, Human."

"I don't think so," said Coley. "Not if I can help it."

"Yes," said the Authority. He went to the entrance of the room and gave orders. Half an hour later, Coley found himself, his belongings, and the girl hurrying on a pair of first-class riding animals out the far end of the pass, headed down toward the seacoast. The early sunset of Yara was upon them and twilight was closing down.

"Great hero," breathed the girl in Yaran. Coley jerked about and stared at her through the gathering gloom. But her expression was as innocuous as ever, and for all the expression there was on her face, it might have been somebody else entirely who had spoken.

"Say that again," said Coley.

But she was through speaking —at least for the present.

Coley had managed to get away with the money hidden in his room. He wore it in a double fold of heavy cloth—a sort of homemade money belt—wrapped around his waist under his shirt; and a few coins taken from it supplied himself and the girl with a room for the night at a way-station that they came to that night after the second moon rose in the sky. The coins also supplied Coley with food—raw meat which he cooked himself over the brazier filled with soft coal which the way-station help brought in to heat the room. He offered some to the girl, but she would not eat it; and if he had not thought of the notion of ordering in some fruit, she might have gone to sleep without any food at all. The last thing he saw, by the dim glow of the dying coals in the brazier was the girl half-curled, half-sitting in a far corner of the room on some cushions and looking in his direction steadily, but still without expression or a word.

The following morning, they left the way-station early. Coley had been wary that in spite of his decision the military Authority might have sent men after them. But evidently the Yaran mind did not work that way. They saw no signs of any threat or soldiers.

By mid-day, between the clumps of bush-like fern that covered the seaward side of these mountains, they began to catch glimpses of the coast below them, and when they stopped to rest their animals in a spot giving them an open view of the lowlands, it was possible for Coley to make out the glittering spire of the traffic control tower in the Human Compound.

He pointed. "We're almost

home," he said, in Basic. The girl looked at him interestedly for a long second.

"Hawmn," she said, finally.

"Well!" said Coley, straightening up in his saddle. "Starting to come to life, are you? Say that again."

She looked at him.

"Say that again," repeated Coley, this time in Yaran.

"Hawmn," she said.

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" said Coley. He applauded. "Now say something else in Basic for the nice man."

"Hawmn," she said.

"No," said Coley. "You've said that. Try something else. Say—say—" He leaned toward her, enunciating the words carefully in Basic. "Friends, Romans, Countrymen—"

She hesitated.

"Frendz, Rawmans, Cundzrememns—" she managed.

"Lend me your ears—"

"Lenz me ur ears—"

"Come on, kid," said Coley, turning his own riding animal's head once more back onto the downtrail, "this is too good to let drop. I come not to bury—"

"I cauzm nodt do burrey—"

They rode on. By the time they reached the first gate of the walled town, as dusk was falling, the girl was reciting in Basic like a veteran. The guard at the gate stared at the strange sounds coming from her mouth.

"What's the matter with her? You can't go in, Human; the gate's already closed for the night. What's your business in Akalede?"

Coley gave the Yaran a handful of coins.

"Does that answer your questions?" he asked.

"Partly—" said the guard, peering at the coins in the falling dusk.

"In that case," said Coley, smoothly, "I suppose I'll just have to wait outside tonight; and perhaps some of my good friends inside the city, tomorrow, can fill out the answer for you. Although," said Coley, "perhaps a fuller answer may not be quite what you—"

"Pass, worthy person," said the gateman, swinging the door wide and standing back deferentially. Coley and the girl rode on into the city of Akalede.

The streets they found themselves in were full of Yarans pushing either homeward, or wherever Yarans went at sundown. From his experience with the commercial area outside the military compound, Coley suspected a majority of the males at least were on their way to get drunk. Or drugged, thought Coley, suddenly remembering he had not been able to drink enough of things Yaran to discover what it was in their potables that addicted the populace to them. He had seen

Yarans become stupefied from drinking, but what kind of stupefaction it was, he suddenly realized, he had not the slightest idea. This made him abruptly thoughtful; and he rode on automatically, trying to chase down an elusive conclusion that seemed to skitter through his mind just out of reach.

His riding animal stopped suddenly. Coming to himself with a start, he saw he had ridden full up against a barricade that blocked the street.

"What the—"

His bridle strap was seized and he looked down at a kilted Yaran whose clothes bore the cut, if not the color of the army.

"Human, you're under arrest," said the lean face. "Where do you think you're going?"

"To the Compound," said Coley. "I and this female Human have to get back—"

"Permissions?"

"Well, you see," said Coley, "We—"

But the Yaran was already leading him off; and other kilted Yarans had fallen in around the mounts of Coley and his companion.

Coley stood, cursing inwardly, but with a bland smile on his face. Behind him, the girl was silent. The heavy drapes of the room in the building to which they had both been brought did not stir. The only thing that stirred was the lips of the rather heavy-set, obviously middle-aged Yaran standing behind a tall desk.

"You have made a mistake," said the middle-aged Yaran.

Coley was fully prepared to admit it. The middle-aged native before him was apparently a local magistrate. As such, he had made it obvious that it was up to him whether Coley and the girl were to be allowed through the barricades into the restricted area of the city that lay between them and the Human Compound. And Coley, judging by his past experience with these people, had just made the mistake of trying to bribe him.

"I am, you see," went on the magistrate, "one of the real people who actually plays the Game. But perhaps you don't know about the Game, Human?"

Coley rubbed his dry lips in what he hoped was a casual gesture.

"A little about it," he said.

"You could hardly," said the magistrate, leaning on the high desk, "know more than a little. Understanding in its full sense would be beyond you. You see—we real people, all of us, hope to reach Old Age." He paused, his black eyes steady on Coley. "Of course, I am not speaking of a physical old age, an age of the body, which is nothing. I am

speaking of true Old Age, that highest level of development that is winnable."

"That's pretty much how I heard it," said Cole.

"Few of us," said the magistrate, going on as if Cole had said nothing, "very few of us make it, and we do it only by playing the Game to perfection."

"Oh. I see," said Coley.

"It does not matter if you do," said the magistrate. "What matters is that I offer you this explanation, leaving it up to you to use, misuse or ignore it as you will. Because, you see, there is one thing required of a player of the Game." He paused, looking at Coley.

"What?" said Coley, filling the gap in the conversation.

"Consistency," said the magistrate. "His rules of living—which he chooses for himself—may be anything, good or bad. But having adopted them, he must live by them. He cannot do himself the violence of violating his own principles. A person may adopt selfishness as a principle; but, having adopted it, he may not allow himself the luxury of unselfishness. He must live by the principles chosen in youth—and with them try to survive to years of maturity and wisdom." He paused. "If he falters, or if the world kills or destroys him, he has lost the Game. So far—" he leaned a little closer to Coley—"I have neither faltered nor been destroyed. And one of my principles is absolute honesty. Another is the destruction of the dishonest."

"I see," said Coley. "Well, what I meant was—"

"You," went on the magistrate, inexorably, "are one of the dishonest."

"Now, wait! Wait!" cried Coley. "You can't judge us by your standards. We're Human!"

"You say that as if it entitled you to special privileges," said the magistrate, almost dreamily. "The proof of the fact that the Game encompasses even you is the fact that you are here caught up in it." He reached below the table and came up with a sort of hour-glass, filled not with sand but with some heavy liquid. He turned it over. "This will run out in a few moments," he said. "If before it has run out you come up with a good reason why you should, within the rules of the Game, be allowed on into the Human Compound, I will let you and the female go. Otherwise, I will have you both destroyed."

The liquid from the little transparent pyramid at the top of the timing device began to run, drop by drop, down into the pyramid below. The liquid was clear, with no reddish tint, but to Coley it looked like the blood he could feel similarly draining out of his heart. His mind flung itself sud-

denly open, as if under the influence of some powerfully stimulating drug, and thoughts flashed through it like small bursts of light. His gutter-bred brain was crying out that there was a gimmick somewhere, that there was a loophole in any law, or something new to get around it —The liquid in the top of the timer had almost run out.

And then he had it.

"How can you be sure," said Coley, "that you're not interrupting a process that greater minds than your own have put in motion?"

The magistrate reached slowly out, took the timer from the top of the desk and put it out of sight behind the desk top.

"I'll have you escorted to the gates of the Human Compound by one of our police persons," he said.

Coley was furious—and that fury of his, according to his way of doing things, hid not a little fear.

"Calm down," said his jailer, one of a squad of star-marines attached to the embassy, unlocking the cell door. "I'll have you out in a minute."

"You'd better, lint-picker," said Coley.

"Let's watch the names," said the star-marine. He was almost as big as Coley. He came inside and stood a few inches from Coley, facing him. "They want you upstairs in the Consul's office. But we got a couple of minutes to spare, if you insist." Coley opened his mouth—then shut it again.

"Forget it," growled Coley. "Shoved into jail—locked up all night with no explanation—you'd be hot, too. I want to see that Consul."

"This way," said the jailer, standing aside. Coley allowed himself to be escorted out of the cell, down a corridor, and up a fall-tube. They went a little way down another corridor and through a light-door into the same office Coley had been in before. Some two weeks before, to be precise. The Consul, Ivor Ben was standing with his back to the hunched, smoke tube in his fingers, and a not pleasant look on his aristocratic face.

"Stand over there," he said; and crossing to his desk, pushed a button on it. "Bring in the girl," he said. He pushed another button. "Let Ansash in now."

He straightened up behind the desk. A door opened behind Coley; and he turned to see the girl he had escorted from Tannakil. She looked at him with her usual look, advanced a few steps into the office, as the door closed behind her, and then halted—as if the machinery that operated her had just run down.

Only a couple of seconds later,

a door at the other end of the room opened, and Ansash came in. He walked slowly into the room, taking in Coley and the girl with his eyes.

"Well, hello there," said Coley. Ansash considered him flatly.

"Hello," he said in Basic, with no inflection whatsoever. He turned to the Consul. "May I have an explanation?"

The Consul swiveled about to look at Coley.

"How about it?"

"How about what?" said Coley.

The Consul stalked out from behind his desk and up to Coley, looking like some small rooster ruffling up to a turkey. He pointed past Coley at the girl.

"This is not the woman I sent you to get!" he said tightly.

"Oh, I know that," said Coley.

The Consul stared at him.

"You *know* it?" he echoed.

"He could hardly avoid knowing," put in the smooth voice of Ansash. "He was left alone with this female briefly, when I went to fetch his beloved. When I returned, he had vanished with this one."

The Consul, who had looked aside at Ansash when the other started speaking, looked back at Coley, bleakly and bitterly.

"That," went on Ansash, "is the first cause of the complaint I brought you this morning. In addition to stealing this real person, the Human, Coley Yunce, has committed other crimes upon the earth of Yara, up to and including murder."

"Yes," breathed the Consul, still staring at Coley. Coley looked bewildered.

"You mean she's no good?" he asked the Consul.

"No good? She isn't Sara Illoy, is she?" exploded the Consul.

"I mean, won't she do?" said Coley. "I mean—she looks pretty human. And she talks fine Basic —" He stepped over to the girl and put a friendly hand on her shoulder. "Recite for them, Honey. Come on, now—'Friends, Romans—'."

She looked up into his face and something that might almost have been a smile twitched at her expressionless mouth. She opened her lips and began to recite in an atrocious accent.

"Frendz, Rawmans, Cundzrememns, I cauzm nodt do burrey Shaayzar, budt do brayze ymn. Dee eefil dawdt memn dooo—"

"Never mind! Never mind!" cried the Consul, furiously; and the girl shut up. "You must have been out of your head!" he barked, and swung about on Ansash. "Very clever, my friend," he grated. "My compliments to Yara. I suppose you know the real Sara Illoy came back of her own accord, the day after this man left."

"I had heard some mention of it," said Ansash, without inflection.

"Very clever indeed," said the Consul. "So it's a choice between handing this man over to your justice to be strangled, or accepting a situation in which contact between our two races on this planet is permanently frozen in a state of Middle-Age restricted contact and chicanery."

"The choice is yours," said Ansash, as if he might have been remarking on the weather.

"I know. Well, don't worry," said the Consul, turning to fling the last three words at Coley. "You know as well as I do I have no choice. Human life must be preserved at all costs. I'll get you safely off-planet, Yunce; though I wouldn't advise you to go boasting about your part in this little adventure. Not that anyone would do anything but laugh at you, if you did." He turned to look at Ansash. "I'm the real loser, as you all know," he added softly. "Yara'll never rate an Ambassador, and I'll never rate a promotion. I'll spend the rest of my professional life here as Consul."

"Or," put in Coley, "in jail."

Three heads jerked around to look at him.

"What kind of a sucker do you take me for?" snarled Coley, spinning around upon the girl. His long arm shot out, there was a very humanlike shriek, and the girl staggered backward, leaving her blonde locks in Coley's fist. Released, a mass of chestnut hair tumbled down to frame a face that was suddenly contorted with shock.

"I learned to look for the gimmick in something before I could walk." He threw the blonde wig in the direction of the Consul's desk. "This set-up of yours stunk to high heaven right from the beginning. So the girl's gone! How'd she get out of the Compound in the first place? How come you didn't call in regular help from the authorities back at Sol? You were all just sitting back waiting for a tough boy you could use, weren't you?"

He glared around at the three in the room. None of them answered; but they all had their eyes on him.

"I don't know what kind of racket you've got here," he said. "But whatever it is, you didn't want the Humans to win the Game, did you? You wanted things to stay just the way they are now. Why?"

"You're out of your head," said the Consul, though his face was a little pale.

"Out of my head!" Coley laughed. "I can *feel* the difference between Ansash and you, Consul. You think I wouldn't notice that the girl I was with was a Yaran, almost right off the bat? And who could suppose I would need a knife when I left Tannakil, but the man who knew I could use one? How come I never

saw her eat anything but fruit? A native Yaran wouldn't have restricted her diet." He leaned forward. "Want *me* to tell *you* what the deal was?"

"I think," said the Consul, "We've listened to enough of your wild guessing."

"No you haven't. Not on your life," said Coley. "I'm back among Humans, now. You can't shut my mouth and get away with it; and either you listen to me, or I'll go tell it to the star-marines. I don't suppose you own them."

"Go ahead, then," said the Consul.

Coley grinned at him. He walked around the Consul's desk and sat down in the Consul's chair. He put his feet on the table.

"There's a world," he said, examining the rather scuffed toes of his boots with a critical eye. "It seems to be run on the basis of an idea about some sort of Game, which is practically a religion. However, when you look a little closer, you see that this Game thing isn't much more than a set of principles which only a few fanatics obey to the actual letter. Still, these principles are what hold the society together. In fact, it goes along fine until another race comes along and creates a situation where the essential conflict between what everybody professes to believe and what they actually believe will eventually be pushed into the open." Coley glanced over at the Consul. "How'm I doing?"

"Go on," said the Consul, wincing.

"The only thing is, this is a conflict which the race has not yet advanced far enough to take. If it came to the breaking point today, half the race would feel it their duty to go fanatic and start exterminating the other half of the race who felt that it was time to discard the old-fashioned Games Ethic." He paused.

"Go on," said the Consul, tonelessly.

"Now, let's suppose this world has a Consul on it, who sees what's happening. He reports back to Sol that the five stages of the Game consist of (1) trying to rid yourself of your enemy by refusing to acknowledge his existence, as a child ignores what it does not like. (2) By reacting against your enemy thoughtlessly and instinctively, as a youth might do. (3) By organized warfare—young manhood. (4) By trickery and subtlety—middle age. (5) By teaching him your own superior philosophy of existence and bringing him by intellectual means to acknowledge your superiority—old age.

"The only trouble with this, the Consul reports, is that the Yaran philosophy is actually a more primitive one than the human; and any attempt to conquer by stage five would induce a sort

of general Yaran psychosis, because they would at once be forced to admit a philosophical inferiority and be *unable* to admit same."

"All right, Mr. Yunce," said the Consul. "You needn't go on —"

"Let me finish. So Sol answers back that they sympathize, but that they cannot violate their own rigid rules of non-interference, sanctity of a single human life, etc., for any situation that does not directly threaten Humanity itself. And this Consul—a dedicated sort—resolves to do the job himself by rigging a situation with help from one of the more grown-up Yarans and a young lady—"

"My aide-de-camp," said the Consul, wearily. Coley bowed a little in the direction of the girl.

"—a situation where a tough but dumb Human sets out inside the Rules of the Game, but so tears them to shreds that the Game-with-Humans is abandoned and set aside—where it will rot quietly and disappear as the two races become more and more acquainted, until it gradually is forgotten altogether. Right?"

Coley looked at him. They looked back at him with peculiarly set faces. Even the Yaran's face had something of that quality of expression to it. They looked like people who, having risked everything on one throw of the dice and won, now find that by gambling they have incurred a sentence of death.

"Fanatics," said Coley, slowly, running his eyes over them. "Fanatics. Now me—I'm a business man." He hoisted himself up out of his chair. "No reason why I shouldn't get on down to the pad, now, and catch the first ship out of here. Is there?"

"No, Mr. Yunce," said the Consul, bleakly. The three of them watched him stalk around the desk and past them to the door. As he opened the door the Consul cleared his throat.

"Mr. Yunce—" he said.

Coley stopped and turned, the door half open.

"Yes?" he said.

"What's—" the Consul's voice stuck in his throat. "Wait a minute," he said. "I'll give you a ride to your ship."

He came around the desk and went out with Coley. They went down and out of the Consulate, but all during the short ride to the Compound's landing pad for the big interspace ships, the Consul said not another word.

He was silent until they reached the ramp leading up to the ship then in ready position.

"Anywhere near Arga IV?" Coley asked the officer at the ramphead.

"No, Sirius and back to Sol. Try the second ship down. Den-

eb, and you can get a double transfer out of Deneb Nine."

Coley and the Consul walked down onto the ramp leading up to the entrance port on the second ship, some twenty feet up the steel sides.

"Farewell," said Coley, grinning at the Consul and starting up the ramp.

"Yunce!" the word tore itself at last from the Consul's lips.

Coley stopped, turned around and looked a few feet down into the older man's pleading eyes.

"What can I do for you?" he said.

"Give me a price," said the Consul.

"A price?" Coley, grinning, spread his hands. "A price for what?"

"For not reporting this back on Sol. If you do, they'll have to take action. They won't have any choice. They'll undo everything you did."

"Oh, they wouldn't do that," said Coley. He grinned happily, leaned down and slapped the smaller man on the shoulder. "Cheer up," he said. The Consul stared up at him. Slowly, the older man's eyebrows came together in a searching frown.

"Yunce?" he said. "Who. . . ? Just who are you anyway?"

Coley grinned and winked at him. And then he burst into a loud laugh, swung about and went trotting up the airlock ramp and into the ship, still laughing. At the airlock, he stopped, turned, and threw something white that fluttered and sideslipped through the air until it fell on the concrete pad by the Consul's feet. The Consul leaned over and picked it up.

It was a folded sheaf of paper, sealed with a melt-clip with no identifying symbol upon it. On one side it was stamped TOP SECRET.

The Consul hesitated, broke it open and looked at it. What stared back up at him was that same report he had written back to the authorities on Sol five years before, concerning the Yaran Game of Five and its possible disastrous conclusion. Clipped to it was a little hand-printed note in rather rakish block capitals.

'WHEN SEARCHING THROUGH GOVERNMENT LISTS DON'T LOOK A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH.'

Scratched in the lower right hand corner of the mouth, as if in idle afterthought, was a small A4.

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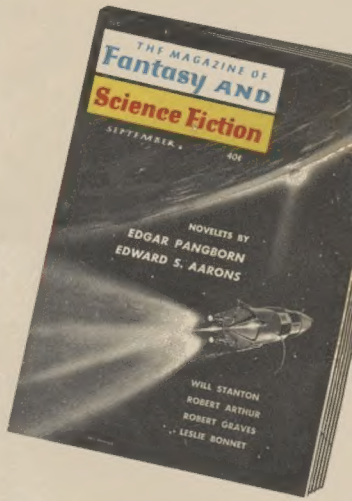

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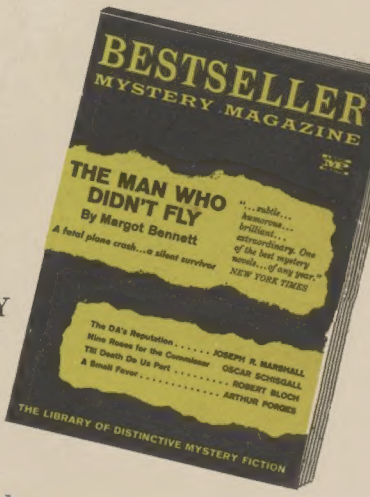
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